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**AURELIO PALMIERI, O.S.A.**

# **ON THE SLOPES OF CALVARY**



## **A RELIGIOUS DRAMA**



**OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL PRINTING SCHOOL  
816 CHRISTIAN STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.**



Mr. Currier

From the author.





# ON THE SLOPES OF CALVARY

*A Religious Drama in Three Acts and in  
Prose Dealing with the Passion  
of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

*by*

REV. FR. AURELIO PALMIERI, D. D., O.S.A.

*Translated from the Italian by*

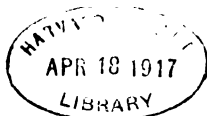
HENRY GRATTAN DOYLE A. M.  
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in Harvard University*



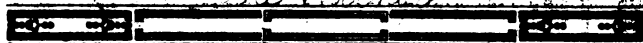
— 1917 —

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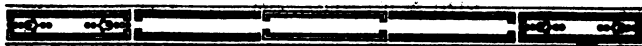


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**BEATISSIMÆ VIRGINI**

**BONI CONSILII MATRI**

**HANC OPELLAM**

**IN PIETATE GENITAM**

**IN MÆRORIBUS AC VEXATIONIBUS MATURATAM**

**HUMILLIME DEDICAT AUCTOR.**







## PREFACE

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In 1914-15, in one of those periods in which the soul, thirsting for God, understands a little more clearly Christ suffering for our redemption and the supernatural beauty of Mary, I wrote a drama to be represented during the Lenten season, to which was given the name "A Child of Judea." The drama was produced in Lawrence, Mass., in 1916, having had the rare fortune to find there a lady Mrs. Walter Rochefort, admirable alike for religious feeling and domestic virtues, who was so moved by reading it that she spontaneously offered her experience as a skilled teacher, her time, her energy, her knowledge to secure its worthy representation on the stage. In this difficult enterprise she was aided by Mr. John P. Mulholland, who, both in the organization of a select dramatic company and in the discharge of the duties of a material nature connected with the production of the drama, displayed an activity beyond praise. The play had a success memorable in the annals of Lawrence, the principal credit being due to the actors and their directress. I personally am convinced that with difficulty, even in large theatres, could my drama find a company of artists so well-chosen as to be compared on equal terms with the devout actors and actresses of Lawrence. All of them surpassed my expectations, and several of them, notably those representing the Blessed Virgin, Esther (the sister Judas), Rachel, Azâr, and Caiphas, really personified the ideal personages that I had created. Words cannot express my gratitude to those who rendered living the world of the spirit created by my religious fervor.

Corrected, revised, and somewhat shortened, the drama now sees the light under a title which corresponds

## PREFACE

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more nearly to its sacred character. The title "On the Slopes of Calvary" seems to me better adapted than "A Child of Judea," to express the principal theme of my drama, which is a hymn of glory to the divinity of Jesus Crucified and of praise to Mary the Mother of Sorrows.

The literary rights to the drama, whether in its first version "A Child of Judea", or in its revised and abridged form "On the Slopes of Calvary" are vested solely in the author, and through him in the Augustinian Order. Without the permission of the author and the authorization of the superiors of the order, the drama "A Child of Judea" was presented for copyright in the name of another. The author hereby publicly declares that he has not ceded nor transferred nor sold the literary property of his work to anyone, whether layman, priest, or member of the order, and that he could not so transfer or sell it without violating the fundamental laws of monastic orders. This public declaration is intended to establish the rights of the author and of the Augustinian Order, to whose superiors is reserved the right of authorizing the presentation of the drama.

Whether this drama, which expresses and synthesizes the devotion of its writer towards the Most Blessed Virgin, be buried like so many human things under the indifference of the public, or whether assimilated by expert actors it continue to sing the glories of Christ and of Mary, it will not result for the author in either useless discouragement or foolish pride. It was written primarily as work of devotion. The reward to which the author aspires is not a human one. The protection of Mary at the moment of death, and the kiss of Jesus in the mansion which lasts forever are the only recompense that he desires in this life and in the other.

F. A. PALMIERI, O. S. A.

Philadelphia, Pa., March 5, 1917.



# CAST OF CHARACTERS

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**BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

**PETER**, the Apostle

**JOHN**, the Beloved

**MARY MAGDALENE**

**MARTHA**

**VERONICA**

**ESTHER**, Sister of Judas

**JUDAS**

**AZAR**, an influential Pharisee

**RACHEL**, his daughter

**ABIGAIL**

**MICHAL**

**ATHALIA**

**JUDITH**

} **Companions of Rachel**

**CAIPHAS**, High Priest

**NAASON**, priest and supporter of Caiphas.

**ELEAZAR**

**ABNER**

**ANNAS**

} **Priests**

**ZACCHEUS** a disciple of Christ

**PILATE**

**LYDIA**, Pilate's wife.

**FULVIA**, Pilate's daughter

**Mob of priests and people**







## ACT I.

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### AZAR'S HOUSE

ABIGAIL, MICHAL, ATHALIA, JUDITH, RACHEL

(The five girls are seated in a circle engaged in inter-twining palms and weaving wreaths of flowers. Rachel is absorbed and thoughtful. Abigail looks at her; with a nudge of her elbow makes a sign to Michal to look then at her also. Both burst into a loud laugh. Rachel starts, as if suddenly awakened. Judith and Athalia let fall the olive branches which they have been holding in their hands, and with a questioning air turn towards their two smiling companions).

ABIGAIL. — Ha, Ha, Ha! Rachel is becoming a young lady. Her pouting little mouth seems to be tightly shut... her face is serious... her mind is wandering in the fields of the infinite... Ha! Ha! Ha!

MICHAL — Pangs of love!... It isn't yet time, my pretty one! We are still butterflies fluttering about in hermetically sealed gardens... and...

ATHALIA. — But what has happened? What has Rachel done?

JUDITH. — (Approaching Rachel and putting her finger under her chin). Rachel, are you dreaming? — What have you done to provoke the laughter of this silly....

ABIGAIL. — Abigail!..... Thanks for the compliment... O venerable matron in Israel... Tell me... are we girls, yes or no?... If we are girls we should laugh, dance, jest, cut capers, chatter, frisk. (She gets up, flings two roses into the air, begins to pirouette, whirls standing upon one foot, giving a few step of a dance movement;

then singing a refrain) We are maidens, we are maidens madcap girls... flowers of Sion... tart young peaches of Judea!

RACHEL. — (Thoughtfully) We are flowers.. but our beauty is fading, our fragrance is vanishing...

MICHAEL. — Why, you are blaspheming, Rachel! (She approaches and with her fingers widens Rachel's eyes). Do you mean to tell me that the beauty of these eyes, the flash of these black diamonds is not fair to see!.. You have lost the gift of intelligence...

RACHEL. — I don't know... I am beginning to live, and to feel the emptiness of life...

ABIGAIL. — Uf!... The emptiness... but, by Nebuchadnezzar! We are not stale, old-fashioned, withered minds, hidden violets, anemic, lifeless hearts. We are the fairest daughters of Sion, the ardent maidens of Sion, who, like Judith, with one glance of fire can subjugate Holofernes... (Pirouetting again). We are the dancing girls of David....

ATHALIA. — Certainly, Rachel, that air of sadness is not fitting. It is a festive day. You yourself have summoned us to weave wreaths and prepare garlands.

ABIGAIL. — (Placing herself before Rachel, with her hands on her hips, and swaying back and forth.) Touch me, look at me, scrutinize me.. I have no emptiness.. Ah!.. yes... a little emptiness in my girlish young stomach... Astarte...

RACHEL. — (Opening wide her eyes) Astarte, but who.... the idol?..

ABIGAIL. — No, Astarte, my favorite hen (all laugh) who has refused to give me the egg that she provides me every two days, and I for spite have been unwilling to eat the egg of Asmodea...

ALL IN CHORUS. — Asmodea!...

ABIGAIL. — Yes, Asmodea, the old black hen, hateful, as hateful, as hateful as a toad!...

RACHEL. — (Laughing) Well, enough of jesting.... let us set to work. We must take part in the triumph of Jesus.

ABIGAIL. — And I assure you, pensive little violet, that we shall do ourselves honor, and do honor to the Master.... To make a group we need three maidens, and we are five.... I shall see what hosannas will burst from our lips. I feel myself capable of putting to flight with my shouts a whole army of crows, And the Pharisees will fume with anger.

MICHAL. — And the Master will say "Well done, my children!"

ATHALIA — And He will implore the blessings of the Father upon us...

JUDITH. — And turn upon us His gentlest, sweetest smile...

RACHEL. — And speak mysteriously to our souls...

ABIGAIL. — Uf!... Rachel, leave off the mystery. We girls are mysterious, but we do not like mysteries. All of us are afflicted with tongues a mite too long: if we don't wag them, they become dry and parched in our mouths. Five minutes of silence is the heaviest penance that can be given me — that is, when I am not asleep. Jesus loves us as we are, prattling, smiling, laughing, frolicking. What a long face His disciples pulled when I told Jesus, that if I had money I would buy a white ass, and He answered: "I shall enter Jerusalem mounted on ass!".... That disagreeable, dark scowling-faced man whom we know now is called Peter, had the daring to say to me under his breath "Impudent little hussy"!.. To me!.. "Impudent little hussy". To me!.. Ha! Ha! Ha!... But the Master looked at him severely, and gently patted my cheek.... and my cheek remained rosy afterwards.

RACHEL. — What do you mean, Abigail?

ABIGAIL. — I mean that I am natural... As you all are also. There are girls who have become living vessels of ointments and of perfumes, which even send the mice scurrying into their holes. There are girls who become painters of themselves - blue on their hands, black on their eye-brows, pink on their cheeks, gold on their hair, egg-yellow on their foreheads, red on their lips. There are girls who deck their hair with jeweled tortoise-shell, and their shoulders with the fur of the fox, who slip their fingers into squirrel's tails, who enwrap their feet in sacks of ermine. I am Abigail, with the color that mamma gave me, and papa, too, with my hair flying loose on the top of my head, with the dress that my grandmother spun and wove for me: Abigail, the girl without mysteries, the rippling cascade of spontaneous laughter... and such I will be always until some gloomy face, like Peter's, comes to carry me off to his house, to condemn me to increase the tribe of Levi, to add new shoots to the majestic tree of the progeny of David. And then... Poor me! poor me! (She hides her face with her hands, as if she were weeping).

MICHAL. — Poor you!... Will you do any pirouetting then?..



ABIGAIL. — Psst... that will be my affair! (archly). For the present let us enjoy the aureole of girlhood. We are treasures, rosebuds, little hearts, pearls, little minds, lilies, delights, as long as we wear the veils of maidenhood. We are capricious little queens who attract glances, gifts and quarrels... Then... then...

RACHEL. — Come, let us be serious. Let us think of the glory of the Master. (There is heard a distant murmur of voices.) Perhaps He is coming now... Let us take the palms... (Abigail approaches the window.)

ABIGAIL. — Yes, He is coming! What a crowd in the distance! Come, girls!... Make haste!... (All take the palms and start to go out, Abigail leading the way, skipping).

RACHEL. — I will rejoin you soon.... I am going to get the roses that I have kept upon the cornice of the window in my room. (The girls go out on one side. Rachel hastily leaves by the opposite side.)

#### AZAR AND RACHEL

(Azar enters the room and sinks into a chair, his elbows resting on the table and his face buried in his hands. From time to time he utters a sigh, then exclaims mechanically:)

AZAR — All is lost... All is lost... Conspiracy... Treachery.. Death!

(Rachel enters very softly, on tiptoe, carrying a bunch of roses upon her arm. She starts in surprise and watches him for a moment, then approaches cautiously and having reached unobserved a spot directly in back of him, puts her hands over his eyes and encircling his head with her arms exclaims:

RACHEL. — There.. You are the prisoner of your little lady, papa... They say you are a very learned man, that you have read ever so many books, that your wisdom is wonderful, and yet a little girl like your Rachel takes you by surprise, binds you with the fetters of her slender arms, and for punishment prints a kiss on your brow!

(Rachel kisses Azar, who slowly frees himself from the girl's embrace, strokes her hair scattered over his shoulders, and tries to smile, but a furtive tear runs his cheeks. Rachel's smile dies away; she lays the roses on the table; her eyes become serious and thoughtful; she rests her hands on her father's shoulders and looking fixedly at him, cries).

RACHEL. — Papa, you are weeping.

AZAR. — No, little daughter (trying to smile and to assume a happy expression.)

RACHEL. — And yet you have often told me that the good God does not love falsehood; that truth is the greatest treasure to which a man can aspire here below... that it is better to meet death itself than to darken the clear and candid veil of truth... You are not weeping?... Then perhaps tears are not the sign of weeping... Perhaps this drop of dew which courses down your cheek is not a tear of sadness which welling from your heart overflows your eyelids? And before you awakened from your sorrowful and solitary meditation perhaps I did not hear the smothered echo of your laments, your repressed sobs, your sighs, yes, even muffled words that spoke of treachery, of death!....

AZAR. — (Growing pale). You heard?... What could I have said?

RACHEL. — I heard, daddy; often you tell me that I am a child in years, but that my heart is precocious. I love the games of childhood, I am thoughtless.... but you confess that at times I can penetrate through the mask of the face to the hidden fibres of the heart, and that my childish innocence has depths more profound than the wisdom of old men.

AZAR. — (Gazing at her with wonderment). Child, who taught you this language?... Verily you are not mistaken. Your features are those of childhood: but from your lips flow words that I have never heard before. And then there is a light in your eyes, a light of happiness, which shines upon my face and moves me deeply.

RACHEL. — (Thoughtfully.) I am no longer the little girl of weeks ago.. Admit it, papa... I am still your Rachel, who loves to sit on your knee, to rest her curly head on your breast, to flutter around you like a chaffinch that feels the stirring of spring. But there is something new, something incomprehensible and unusual in my soul. My girlish heart has been transformed. Once I lived in anxiety, in terror. There pursued me everywhere the image of God, a God furious against men, an implacable Judge; my very soul seemed to shrivel when you spoke of God, when you told me of the fearful punishments inflicted with His rod of iron upon His enemies. I had fear of God, and I sought to forget it in the happy thoughtlessness of my youth, in children's games... But now God no longer seems to me a Judge whose glance my

soul, seized with mysterious trembling, does not dare to meet. I have seen God conversing with little children.

AZAR. — (Interrupting her) Are you raving?... Rachel.... Your lips have uttered a blasphemy..... (Aside) And yet, there is a strange fascination in her words. From what impetuous stream does her eloquence flow?

RACHEL. — Listen, daddy. God has talked with the little children. (Becoming more animated). His face was resplendent with a beauty which is as the beauty of the heavens illuminated by the sun in all the glory of its noonday radiance... His eyes sparkled like flawless diamonds; His breath was pure and fragrant, like the breath of spring over a field of roses; His voice was enchanting, harmonious, like the clear trilling of a thousand night-ingales in the lonely recesses of the great forest.... The caress of His hand was soft, gentle, more gentle even than the touch of a mother's hand on the sweat-dampened brow of her little child struggling in the agony of death... And my eyes were dazzled by the brightness of His countenance, my heart swelled like the waves of the sea in a storm, a tremor of happiness ran through my limbs, and my knees bent in an attitude of timid adoration; a flood of new life seemed to warm my veins, and my soul seemed to wing its flight to distant regions, to lose itself in an ocean of infinite blessedness, to sigh with a happy sigh, with such a happy sigh: I love Thee, I love Thee, oh Lord, my God!

(Rachel falls to her knees; her hands are raised to heaven: her eyes seemed fixed and rapt in the sight of a delightful vision. Azar contemplates for a few moments with paternal tenderness the girl kneeling at his feet, then raises her, and placing his hand upon her head exclaims)

AZAR. — The blessing of God has descended upon the daughter who is the joy of my existence. The spirit of the Lord speaks through her lips and utters mystic words. The heavenly wisdom of babes confounds the wisdom of graybeards. The finger of God touche their innocent souls and in an instant makes sprout the seed which buried in the soul has awaited the fertilizing ray of the sun of spring.

(As if awakening from a dream, Rachel again assumes her carefree, youthful smile, and taking in hers her father's hands:)

RACHEL. — Sit down papa. I will tell you what happened to me the day before yesterday. It is something

that has infused into my soul an ineffable sweetness. I hardly dare speak of it, I fear that with my secret may vanish the perfume of happiness that so intoxicates me.

AZAR. — I am listening to you, my daughter... I understand you... some friend has probably promised you a golden bird, some plaything to add to the precious outfit of your doll.

RACHEL. — (poutingly) You are jesting and I am speaking to you seriously. Haven't you said that I am no longer the thoughtless Rachel, the little girl?...

AZAR. — I will call you the failing old woman with the golden hair, with sparkling eyes, with rosy cheeks. Are you content?

RACHEL. — Hm... (With a curling of her lips) Either listen to me, or for revenge I will go and collect all the spiders who weave their webs in the corners of the ceiling, and hide them in your coverlets, so that they may disturb your sleep in the dead of night and compel you to give them chase.

AZAR. — Ah! Now I recognize my little avenger!... But since I am far from being a diviner, reveal to me the secret which you have concealed so zealously for two days in your heart, usually as clear as crystal to your father.

RACHEL. — Listen, daddy. There were five of us. Sephora, the oldest, was leading. We had taken the path which flanks the Mount of Olives and were descending towards Cedron. The road was deserted; the fields silent. Only our silvery voices broke the monotony of the rustic silence. We reached the oak of Torah, the majestic oak which often gathers under its branches the noisy throngs of the children of Solima. We wished to rest, to sit down on the grass, to chirp like the sparrows hidden among the leafy branches. But a Stranger had arrived there before us, and was sitting all weary on the stone bench which almost touches the aged trunk of the oak tree. He was very beautiful, this Stranger. An infinite sweetness shone from His eyes and overcame our shyness, and attracted us with an appeal we could not resist. We surrounded Him with a feeling of respect, of veneration, of fear. He called each of us by name, and when we marveled because He knew us, we heard from His lips these words: "Nothing is hidden from Him who speaks to ye in the name of the Lord!"

AZAR. — (becoming agitated) And He said nothing else to you! Was He alone?... Did you not see anyone else with Him?...



RACHEL. — Listen, father. You shall know all form my lips. He spoke to us of God, who feeds the birds of the air, who makes the meadows sparkle with flowers, who clothes with silken sheen the lilies of the field, who loves the innocent babes, and unveils to innocence the treasures of His goodness. We hung upon His words. No man had spoken to us as this Man. His speech seemed to us to render more beautiful the serenity of the heavens, to unveil even to the hearts of us children the treasures of teachings which we had never understood in school. I was nearest to Him. He kept His hand in mine, and at times turned upon me a look of profound sadness mingled with profound affection. But I no longer had fear of Him; and while my companions did not dare to speak to Him, I asked Him: "What is Thy name, Master?"... "Well hast thou spoken", he answered. "I am the Master who heals visible wounds and hidden ones. I am the Master who opens to the love of the Father the hearts of His children, and who leads back to the Father those who have betrayed Him by losing their way in the tortuous paths of sin. "But Thy name, Master! — And He, slowly pronouncing the syllables, responded, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Galilean!"

AZAR. — Jesus of Nazareth!.. I was not mistaken! (He walks excitedly to and fro). His shadow pursues me. His name redoubles the beating of my heart: His doctrine confonds my knowledge... (A short pause: Rachel looks at him with wonder.)

RACHEL. — You know Him, father!

AZAR — I know Him... But continue your story. What followed?

RACHEL. — I said to Him. "Jesus of Nazareth, truly you are the best Master that we have heard. Perhaps you teach?... Have You in Your native City a great band of disciples who come and listen to Your lessons?... And he, "Yes, children, I am a Wise man, but My wisdom is not Mine: It is the wisdom of Him who hath sent me to men: the wisdom of Him who illuminates men sitting in darkness. Ye hear from My lips the mysterious words of this wisdom, but the day will come in which ye shall understand these mysteries, in which the fullness of the light will inundate your eyes, in which ye shall adore in Him who speaks to ye the Son of the Living God." We looked at Him confounded, daddy. And I, always more daring than the others, continued to question Him. "But none of us heard of a Son of God. In our schools we have

learned that there is only one God, the King of Israel, who revealed his laws to Moses." And He answered: "Thou speakest, daughter, according to the doctors who until now have guided the chosen people. But the wisdom of the Son of Man is superior to that of the doctor of the earth, and thou, little one, whom I shall preserve to render testimony of My glory, come nearer, and sit upon My knees: from this moment the spirit of the Father will suggest to thee words that thou wouldst not be capable of pronouncing even after long years of study. Rachel, thou shalt give testimony of the Son of Man". He was silent. But I, daddy, felt in my soul a breath of new life. My eyes seemed immersed in a sea of light. The features of Jesus of Nazareth became luminous as diamonds upon which shine the rays of the sun. A secret impulse was urging me to throw myself at the feet of Jesus, to say to Him, "Thou art Jesus, Thou art the Son of the living God!" when a group of men, grave and thoughtful, came towards Him.

AZAR. — His disciples, perhaps?... Were there many of them?...

RACHEL. — No, daddy. There were five in all. They seemed overcome with sadness. They approached Jesus, and said to Him, "Master, the hour has come." One of them, whose fierce glance frightened us, roughly pushed us away from the Master. But He, with a stern face, raised His right hand and said. "Judas, let the little ones come unto me." And again taking me by the hand, He added, "Rachel, remember that there is no happiness greater than that of receiving into one's soul a ray of the heavenly understanding. Go then, and relate to Azar what thou hast seen and heard, and tell him that the Son of Man has need of noble and active souls that know how to defend Him."..... Then we left Him, and He smiled at us from afar off, and afterwards arose and followed his disciples.

AZAR. — (Thoughtfully) — Noble and active souls, that know how to defend Him.

(There is heard in the distance a choir of children singing:

"Hosanna, Hosanna to Jesus of Nazareth."

(Rachel runs to the window, and turning to her father)

RACHEL. — Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth in approaching. I must hasten, daddy. I want to see His face again, to sing the hosanna myself, to tell Him that you love Him as I love Him.

(She kisses Azar on the forehead and goes out singing under her breath the hymn "Hosanna to Jesus of Nazareth!")

### AZAR ALONE

AZAR. — (Meditating) Noble, active souls.... To defend Him.... And I am still the slave of my doubts: the victim of my hesitations: the author of my own anxieties: the torturer of my own heart. But who art Thou, Jesus of Nazareth? Now my soul feels itself won by the charm which comes from Thy teachings, from the words of goodness which flow from Thy lips: now my heart launches against Thee arrows of hate because a strange presentiment tells me that Thou wilt bring unutterable ruin upon our race, that Thou wilt destroy the great ideal of our people, the ideal of a universal supremacy over all nations, of an empire that will overshadow the glory of our enemy, obscure the glory of Rome! Art thou God?... Thou art an impostor... But no, that is a blasphemy which bursts from the lips, but which the beating of my heart belies. Jesus, an impostor!... a word of Thine, a caress of Thine, makes green the withered branches. At Thy powerful inspiration the soul of a girl is transformed into an ark of divine wisdom. Thy fingers have a mystic power, which rules the forces of nature. Thy glances scatter rays which are the reflection of a sun which verily does not shine upon human heads. Jesus of Nazareth!... Why dost Thou torture my soul? At the banquet of Simon, the most esteemed of the Pharisees, Thou didst gaze long at me and didst penetrate the inmost fibers of my soul with Thy look!..... Tell me what Thou wishest; loose with Thy words the knot of my doubts. Must I betray Thee, a target for the hatred of those who aspire to restore the greatness, the triumph, the liberty of the chosen people?... Must I betray that people which Thou sayest Thou lovest, but to which Thou counselest renunciation of its dreams of conquest, vile and cowardly subjection to the proud dominators of Rome!... Love of Country!... Love of the Man who calls himself the Son of God! And in a little while I shall be called upon to choose between these two... In a little while with my speech and my arguments I shall have to condemn Jesus of Nazareth, or justify Him. In this house, in this room, in which the apple of my eye, the little daughter in whom sings the joy of my youth, who recalls to me at every moment the sweet smile of my beloved Judith, torn from my embrace in giving me the

first pledge of our love (wiping away a tear) yes, in this very room, my conscience will undergo a frightful struggle.... Jesus of Nazareth!... Must I prefer Thee to my people?... Jesus of Nazareth!.. Are Thou truly God who can dissipate the clouds, the anxious uncertainties of hearts?... If Thou art, I pray to Thee, I implore Thee!.. I cannot pray to Thee as God, but Thou art from God; Thy human semblance does not veil completely the divine splendor of Thy soul! Jesus of Nazareth... sustain a fragile human reed which wavers in the power of the impetuous winds of doubt!

(He seats himself, resting his forehead on his hand. The street door opens and a woman, prematurely aged, enters, raising a black veil with which her face is swathed. Her face is marked with deep sadness. She stops at the threshold, contemplates Azar who sits sunk in deep meditation, twice moves her lips as if to speak and then keeps silent. Finally she approaches Azar, and stopping several steps away, exclaims).

#### ESTHER AND AZAR

ESTHER. — Azar, pardon a stranger who stealthily has entered your house!

(Azar, as if waking from a dream, starts to his feet, and turns a curious and questioning look upon the unexpected guest.)

AZAR. — Who are you, woman? What do you seek? Why do you cross the threshold of my house thus unbidden?

ESTHER. — I am a stranger!.. There is no need for you to know my name. I have crossed unbidden the threshold of your house. But perhaps this house is not especially hospitable?... Perhaps it is not the house in which meet in secret councils (ironically) the chiefs of the Synagogue!

AZAR. — (Starting) — My house is sacred to friendship!

ESTHER. — Say rather to treachery!

AZAR. — (After a short pause) But who gives you the right to penetrate into other's houses, to pry into domestic secrets, even to insult persons whom you do not know...

ESTHER. — Justice and Truth!... The two sovereigns before whom alone I bow my head.

AZAR. — (Ironically, shrugging his shoulders) Justice and Truth!.. (Laughing) One would say that your

soul has also received the imprint of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth!

ESTHER. — Do not blaspheme, Azar. Your knowledge is a worthless tinsel compared to the pure gold of the wisdom of the Nazarene. And even supposing that I am a follower of Jesus, if my words are in accord with truth and justice is it not your duty to hearken to them?

AZAR. — For me, woman, truth and justice are what is in accord with the welfare, the prosperity, the glorious future, the supremacy among nations of the people of Israel.

ESTHER. — A wealth stained with blood, accursed by crime, is not a source of prosperity, Azar; and the glory of a race redeemed by blood and by treachery may perhaps be a worm gnawing at the heart of the chosen people. Azar, you who scoff at the wisdom of the Nazarene, are you not yourself ignorant in comparison with a woman?... And can it be that you do not feel in the depths of your heart a stern voice which reproves you, the voice of that God whom you Pharisees have marred with your hypocrisy?

AZAR. — (Aside) — The insult is unbearable; but my conscience warns me that perhaps this woman is right... (Aloud) Ah! Woman, I recognize in your invectives not only the ideas but even the style of your Master. Jesus is not the friend of the Pharisees, and you share His dislikes with Him. But the hour is later. Lay aside your sarcasms, and tell me with what motive you have crossed the threshold of a house which you do not frequent?..

ESTHER. — I await a soul as dear to me as my own. He is one of your adherents. I was mistaken. Perhaps the appointed hour has not yet arrived.

AZAR. — You are mistaken, woman. My house is deserted. Tell me the name of him whom you call one of my adherents.

ESTHER. — His name is not worth revealing. Have heroes of treason and conspiracy names?..

AZAR. — I have long tolerated your insults, woman. Innate kindness of heart and the compassion which your face, emaciated and marked by sorrow, inspires, have induced me to treat you courteously. But it seems that the time has come to invite you to take your leave.

ESTHER. — In other words, you expel an unwelcome intruder.

AZAR. — Yes. You must begone.

**RACHEL, AZAR, ESTHER.**

(Rachel enters skipping. She hears the last words of her father and Esther, and throwing herself into her father's arms, exclaims).

RACHEL. — No, daddy. Let anyone who enters our house always be welcome!

(Azar casts a glance at his daughter, then looks at Esther, in the manner of one who is about to continue a discussion. Suddenly as if struck by an unforeseen thought he goes out without speaking.)

**RACHEL AND ESTHER**

RACHEL. — You seem very sad, woman. Has my father offended you? Do not wonder at it! Some days he seems preoccupied, thoughtful, dejected, weighed down by the burden of heavy responsibilities. I question him, and he answers me with monosyllables, with curt words, and seems absorbed in grievous worries.

ESTHER. — Do not be deceived, little girl. Oh! If he only were willing to open his eyes to the light of truth, if he were willing to hearken to the secret conscience which holds him in continual anxiety, if he were willing to refresh himself at those springs of purest water which quench our thirst forever, if he were willing to recognize the supreme majesty of Him who clothes Himself with human attributes, he would be in a moment cured of his anguish, freed from the leaden cloak which oppresses him.

RACHEL. — You also speak the language of the Nazarene, woman.

ESTHER. — (Impulsively) Ah!.. Do you know Him, maiden?... If perhaps... even you... But, no, I am mistaken. In the house of the Pharisee!... It would be an absurdity.

RACHEL. — Why these harsh words on your lips? I know Jesus of Nazareth; He has called me by name; He has given me His caress; He has placed His finger upon my very soul.

ESTHER. — (Embracing her effusively). Ah, maiden!... Yes!.. I read it in your glance... There shines upon your face the luminous radiance that the Nazarene gives to hearts flooded by His grace. You are ours... No... you belong to Jesus... You are the pure, innocent soul that He has chosen, you are the essence of the virtue that He loves; you are the breath of His heart. Ah, maiden.... you are blooming like a lily even in the house of the Pharisee,

and even under this roof where the infamy of treason will be consummated, a blossom perfumes the corrupt and pestilential air.

RACHEL. — Alas!... You speak of treason.... In my father's house! The upright man, the just man!...

ESTHER. — Do not be frightened, child. Even into just hearts the serpent of sordid weakness, of ignoble character, sometimes finds room to slip. But the moments are flying, maiden. Harken..... (There is heard a confused murmur, as of persons approaching)... The enemies of the Nazarene are plotting in the shadows! Listen, maiden; we must find some retired corner in this house from which we can hear the words, the foul proposals of the traitors (with a sob) or rather of the traitor! It concerns the very life of the Divine Master!

RACHEL. — (Growing pale) The Nazarene in danger... In this house! (With a smile of incredulity) But you are mistaken, woman. My father is animated by the most sincere admiration for the Nazarene. I have never heard from his lips a word against Him.

ESTHER. — The voices are coming nearer... A safe hiding-place to hear, and perhaps, if we are in time, to frustrate the plans of the betrayers!

RACHEL. — Come into this alcove here, through this door. There we shall remain hidden. (She goes out by the side door, holding Esther's hand.)

CAIPHAS, NAASON, ZACCHEUS, AZAR, ABNER,  
ELIAZAR, PHARISEES.

(Caiphas enters, accompanied by several priests, conferring in low voices, gesticulating nervously. The first comers walk with slow steps through the dimly lighted room. Passing in front of the window which overlooks the street, Caiphas looks out furtively, and hearing a confused sound of "Hosanna to the Son of David," gives a shake of his head and gesticulates more nervously. A few moments after the entrance of Caiphas, Zaccheus arrives, and turns up his nose at sight of Caiphas, Naason enters solemnly, with three doctors of the Synagogue. There follow other Pharisees with scowling faces, who slowly approach and dispose themselves in order around the table which occupies the center of the room. All talk among themselves, except Zaccheus, who remains in a corner, drumming with his fingers on his bald head. Lastly Azar

enters, thoughtful. All turn towards him, bowing, and Caiphas speaks in the name of all).

CAIPHAS. — Azar, may the God of Jacob bless your house and your stock. We thank you for the hospitality which you grant us in your house, and may impiety and blasphemy soon cease to lead astray the children of Israel.

NAASON. — May my prophecy be fulfilled, and may the iron rod of Almighty God reduce to dust the impious ones, who....

ZACCHEUS. In the name of the Lord make the blind to see and the deaf to hear; (meaningly) and the devout income of Naason's synagogue to diminish.

NAASON. — (With irritation). Be silent, insect. Since the day when you hurriedly climbed down from the sycamore tree to introduce Jesus into your house you resemble an apostle of the Nazarene.

ZACCHEUS. — (Continuing to tap his head) You do not know that that sycamore, since my precipitous descent, has become a majestic tree, and that when the wind blows its branches undulate, whispering, "Hosanna to Jesus of Nazareth."

NAASON. — Be silent, contemptible worm!

AZAR. — Peace betwixt you, my friends. We are gathered to discuss very weighty problems; the future of our people, the future of the synagogue, the preaching of new doctrines which we believe contrary to the wisdom contained in the laws of Moses.

CAIPHAS. — "We believe", Azar! Your words seem to me over optimistic! There is a profound antithesis between the doctrines of Jesus the Nazarene and those that are contained in the precious books written by men inspired of God, and by holy prophets.

ZACCHEUS. — Naason's insect does not share the ideas of the High Priest. Jesus has never preached in depreciation of Moses and of our holy prophets. He often quotes their words and affirms that their books are inspired by God. If, therefore he praises the authors of our sacred books, how can it be said that his teaching is contrary to their teaching?....

NAASON. — Zaccheus has applied himself to the study of logic since he has become the friend of the Nazarene. He has lost his hair in it, and perhaps also that morsel of brain that he once had in his cranial cavity.

ZACCHEUS. — You can be certain, Naason, that such crutches will not avail to prop up your arguments. I may have lost my morsel of brain in the study of logic;



but you, Naason, have ever been devoid of it. Logic was always a cruel stepmother to you.

AZAR. — (Authoritatively) I repeat that we have not met here to launch trivial witticisms and ironic remarks at each other. It seems to many of us that the time has come to erect a barrier against the doctrines that Jesus of Nazareth is spreading. This Man boasts Himself to be the Son of God. Many of our followers declare that He is seducing the crowds. His fate must be decided this evening. We shall destroy this idol of the multitude, who emboldened by the popular favor likens Himself to God, openly opposes us, and nullifies our influence.

ZACCHEUS. — But with what weapons does He nullify our influence? Are they our own? If it is not human knowledge, if it is not wealth that makes Jesus the idol of the multitude, what is the mystic source of the charm which radiates from His Person?... You wish to crush Him... But are you in a position to do it?... After having crushed Him will you succeed in stifling His teachings?...

AZAR. — It seems to me, O Caiphas, that Zaccheus has really touched upon an important point in our discussion. Jesus has made Himself famous through His miracles, through a superhuman power that radiates from His eyes, from His lips, even from His garments.

CAIPHAS. — (Rising, with an air of disbelief) Jesus is an evil magician... Jesus has received His power from Beelzebub, the prince of demons. His power...

ZACCHEUS. — And why then is Jesus the most stubborn enemy of the prince of demons?... How many persons possessed by the spirit of evil have not been cured by His word? How can Beelzebub confer on his most stubborn enemy a power which the latter uses only to destroy him?

(The Pharisees look at each other with an embarrassed air. Caiphas remains silent, casting looks of scorn and hatred at Zaccheus. Naason snorts. Azar remains pensive. After a short pause he rises and with a grave, troubled voice speaks as follows)

AZAR. — Yes, Caiphas. This is the anxious problem which torments me. There is an influence which acts in Jesus and gives Him a power which no man has ever enjoyed. This power therefore is not derived from man. You say it is derived from the prince of demons. But Zaccheus is not wrong when he says that if this superhuman power is directed against the authority of Beelze-

bub, it can not be derived from him. Who, therefore, gives this power to Jesus?... (A pause; all remain silent.) Oh!.. the anxiety of my soul. Who is mistaken?... Can our knowledge of the Scriptures be faulty?... God grant that it be not. But if the works of Jesus attest a power which comes from God, there must be something divine in the spirit of Jesus.

CAIPHAS. — Azar, Azar, even you waver in your faith. We, the people of Israel, we Hebrews scattered through the world are destined to rule the universe. We wish all peoples to be our slaves. We are a little nation, but God has promised us the wealth of the earth. If we have not the strength of armies, we have the power of gold, and with gold we shall conquer the world. This is our ideal. Jesus, on the contrary, preaches poverty, confounds us with peoples accursed by God, penetrates even into the houses of Pagans, of idolaters, bands all together in a universal brotherhood. His power, therefore, is of little import. He is the enemy of our people, of our glory, of our faith. We must reduce Him to helplessness, and for a man like the son of the smith of Nazareth, the only means of reducing Him to impotence is death, the death of a criminal. What say you to it, o priests of the temple?

PHARISEES. — (In chorus) The High Priest speaks like an oracle of God. Death to Jesus!

NAASON — Death to Jesus! The logic of Zaccheus is the logic of traitors to their country and enemies of God!

ZACCHEUS. — Say rather the logic of good sense... You admit that this Man raises the dead. If He is victorious over death in others, can he not conquer death in His own person?... If you really are men of God, why do you not imitate His works?

FIRST PHARISEE. — Hold your peace.

SECOND PHARISEE. — You are an enemy of your own race.

THIRD PHARISEE. — The hired mouth-piece of Jesus.

FOURTH PHARISEE. — A disgrace to the Synagogue.

AZAR. — Let us keep the peace, let us preserve calmness in our assemblage. You are not unaware that my ideals are contrary to those of Jesus, that at times I think I hate this Man who confounds our plans for the liberation, the independence, the political greatness of our people; but yet at times it seems to me that I am almost on the

point of adoring Him. But I ask you all: "Is it true that Jesus has even raised the dead, Lazarus, our friend, as well as the daughter of Sefar...."

(A pause; no one answers. Finally Caiphas rises, and with vehemence, exclaims)

CAIPHAS. — We know that Beelzebub, the prince of demons, is powerful; he is a master in the art of deceiving the credulous; Jesus is dominated by the spirit of evil and in the name of the spirit of evil performs His miracles.

ZACCHEUS. — We must judge the tree by its fruit. If the fruits of the preaching and of the miracles of Jesus are good, if this Man cures the sick, heals the wounds of souls, restores peace to tortured hearts, it is the spirit of God that acts in Him.

CAIPHAS. — I do not wish to argue with you. You are a renegade; why, in moments precious to us, when all is ready for the fulfillment of the vengeance which God imposes on us, do you come to disturb our assembly, to intrude your discordant voice into our unanimity?...

ZACCHEUS. — My voice is the voice of truth and justice... Yours that of conspiracy and treachery!

(All rise and look threateningly at Zaccheus. Naason approaches him almost in the attitude of using violence. But Zaccheus more forcefully still, extending his right hand toward the entrance door, exclaims:)

ZACCHEUS. — Conspiracy and treachery. Behold him, the wretch whom you have chosen to commit the most infamous crime that the human mind has ever conceived, the crime that will render our race execrable through all future ages. I quit this house which one day will be odious in the sight of all men.

(Zaccheus starts to leave. Before crossing the threshold, he turns a look of scorn on Judas, who has heard the last words of Zaccheus, and hesitates, almost as if about to depart. But Caiphas hastily goes to meet him, takes him by the hand and leads him to the place he himself had previously occupied, while Zaccheus goes out launching at the Pharisees these words)

ZACCHEUS. — Jesus can not die! He is the Son of the Living God!..

CAIPHAS. — Here you are at last, my friend. You have given ear to the voice of your conscience. You have returned to those who desire the triumph of God and the glory of the chosen people. My friends, I am happy to present to you one of the most intimate disciples of Jesus,

Judas Iscariot. He not only will reveal to us the impostures of Him who calls himself the Son of God, but at the same time will help us make Him fall into our snares. Judas is henceforth one of us.

JUDAS. — (With a troubled voice). Caiphas, I have come at your invitation... I am ready to fulfill the commission which you impose on me. I foresee that Jesus will not be able long to resist the enemies that surround Him, and I have not the least desire to sacrifice myself for Him or with Him. He is not truly an impostor, Caiphas; the marvelous works that are attributed to Him I have seen with my own eyes, and I can not explain them. But yet I detest Jesus of Nazareth, and am ready to give Him into the hands of those that hate Him.

AZAR. — Why do you harbor in your heart so much hatred against Him whom you venerated as your Master until a few days ago? Have you recognized the falsity of His teachings?

JUDAS. I do not hate the teachings of Jesus! I hate in Him the Man who has made me suffer, who has wounded my soul. I am superior in knowledge to all the other disciples. I expected the highest post for myself. My ability gave me the right to claim the presidency in the assembly of His disciples. Instead He preferred the most unpolished, the most ignorant, Peter, the Galilean fisherman. My heart bleeds at the memory of this offense. And that is not all. I hoped at least to become His confidant, the friend of His heart for whom there are no mysteries, no secrets. But no!... He preferred John, the youngest. I flattered myself finally with the hope of becoming the sole depositary of the offerings, of the gifts which Jesus receives from His friends and admirers. And even this light satisfaction is denied me. Jesus has been cruel toward me. I loved Him in those early months when first I followed Him, hearing from His lips words which flooded my mind with light. But now intense hatred has dried up the very roots of love.

AZAR. — I think I understand your secret thoughts and plans, Judas. If Jesus had chosen you as chief of His followers, or as His treasurer, you would not have abandoned Him?

(Judas looks at him suspiciously, diffidently. Then he lowers his eyes and remains silent).

AZAR. — We at least wish that Jesus be silenced because we believe we can thus defend and guard the interests of our race and preserve our traditions, threat-

ened by the new preachings of Jesus. But you wish the ruin of Him who chose you as His disciple, because you have not succeeded in winning Him over to your ends, Perhaps I am mistaken in my judgment?

JUDAS. — I have not come to discuss that question, Azar. The High Priest has proposed to me a recompense for a service that he asks of me. You have no right to seek to penetrate the secret of my heart. Caiphas, did you invite me here to explain the motives which have induced me to separate myself from Jesus?

CAIPHAS. — Azar, I fear that you also are besmirching yourself in the new furrow dug by Jesus in the field of our doctrines. We are all agreed that we must have an end of Jesus, that we must seal His lips, that we must bind His hands with chains of iron in order that he may cease His miracles. Jesus must disappear from the stage that He has chosen for Himself in our native land. Friends, is this not our ideal?...

(All except Azar rise, and Naason with a thundering voice exclaims).

NAASON. — Caiphas has faithfully expressed our wishes. We must do away with Jesus.

AZAR. — Friends, I am of the opinion that we can and must oppose the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth; we must neutralize His influence over the crowds; to use the common expression, we must stop His mouth. But I should not be willing that violence be used against Him.

NAASON. — Blasphemers against God merit punishment, infamy, death!

CAIPHAS. — We shall decide later the fate of Jesus. What is important at present is that we take Jesus from the zealous custody of His disciples, that we cast in His face the most serious accusations against Him. Naason, and you, priests of the Most High and indomitable defenders of the teachings of the Pharisees, go forth and incite the rabble, represent Jesus an enemy of the people, as a blasphemer of God, as an instrument of Satan. Preach that His miracles are illusions and frauds perpetrated by the spirit of evil. To myself I reserve the glory of surprising Jesus, of consigning Him into the hands of the Roman guards, and of demanding severe measures towards Him. And you, Azar, who so courteously have extended hospitality to our assemblage, leave me alone with Judas Iscariot. We shall take with him the measures necessary to attain our end.

(All go out. Azar with slow steps, turning around

from time to time, goes out last, and as he crosses the threshold exclaims in a low voice).

AZAR. — A cold chill seizes my limbs!... Jesus!.. My house has been hospitable to the betrayers of Jesus!.. And if He is really the Son of God!... Have pity on me, O God of Israel!...

#### CAIPHAS AND JUDAS.

CAIPHAS. — We are alone, Judas. You preferred a secret interview?

JUDAS. — Yes, Caiphas.

CAIPHAS. — Do you then accept the proposition?... You are willing to betray?...

JUDAS. — Betray, no. To hand over to you Jesus of Nazareth, to indicate Him to the soldiers who shall come to take Him prisoner, if....

CAIPHAS. — The choice of terms is of little importance. To betray Jesus or to hand Him over to us are to me equivalent expressions. When will you carry out your promise?...

JUDAS. — Tomorrow, at nightfall.

CAIPHAS. — Whither shall my men betake themselves?

JUDAS. — To the garden of Gethsemane.

CAIPHAS. — And what sign will you give them that they may distinguish Jesus in the circle of His disciples?

JUDAS. — I shall approach Jesus and kiss Him on the forehead!

CAIPHAS. — You will use the sign of friendship to betray Him? I can not help admiring your device.

JUDAS. — Any other means would not be free from danger!

CAIPHAS. — You are free in the choice of methods. We wish only to get possession of Jesus.

JUDAS. — Your wishes will be satisfied. It is your place now to fulfill your promises. The money!

CAIPHAS. — Do not fear! You will have the reward that is fitting for you.

JUDAS. — I will not move a step from here until I have the money. Gold fascinates me...

CAIPHAS. — I have brought you silver.

JUDAS. — Gold, silver, anything that will procure for me property, the pleasures of the world, anything that will satiate my eagerness for revenge, my unsatisfied ambition, I accept all.

CAIPHAS. — I have brought with me twenty-five pieces of silver.

JUDAS. — (His face darkening) Twenty-five pieces!.. A very poor business. I thought that you would give my services a better recompense.

CAIPHAS. — Yours, Judas, is not a task that demands an ample recompense. For a kiss you receive a royal reward.

JUDAS. — But it is a kiss that perhaps in its feigned sweetness carries the poison of death.

CAIPHAS. — Since you are not satisfied, I shall add five pieces more. If you still refuse, I must seek other means. The Pharisees are powerful, and Jesus shall not escape my hands.

JUDAS. (with a sigh) Let it be for thirty pieces, then. No one will be able to take them from me. Give them to me. (Stretching out his hand.)

CAIPHAS. — You know that the High Priest can not touch the hand that opens for a friend the doors of prison. See, I place on the table this purse which contains the thirty pieces of silver. Tomorrow you shall give the kiss to Jesus, and in that way will render possible our vengeance. Count your shekels, Judas. I foresee for you a happy night and a serene tomorrow.

(He goes out, avoiding looking at Judas.)

#### JUDAS ALONE.

JUDAS. — Now I am almost rich. Never have I possessed so much money. (He takes the coins from the purse and begins to count them with greedy gestures.) I have freed myself from the yoke of the Nazarene and shall live in luxury for a long time!..... Ah!..... I shall see what Peter, the prince of His disciples, will do to defend Him. And John, His favorite!..... I shall repay Thee with interest for the humiliations that I have suffered, o Jesus of Nazareth!..... (He remains absorbed for a moment, his eyes fixed on space) And yet, why do I betray Him?..... Ah! not long since I was at supper with Him, and he said to me: "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, he will betray Me." What a strange prediction!..... And His look was so sorrowful! Poor Jesus! (Another moment of silence; then with a sardonic smile) Away with superstitions, Judas! You are fortunate in carrying out your mission. How these silver coins sparkle! (He turns them over on the table) What a pleasing clink!..... What joys they promise my senses..... Ah! Ah! ..... Jesus of

Nazareth is worth thirty pieces of silver (putting his hand on his heart with an expression of intense pain on his face). My heart seems breaking..... It seems that a wicked spirit is smothering it in his serpent coils..... I feel a strange discomfort. Internal fires devour me. (Opening wide his eyes and raising his hands) Behold him, Jesus! Come, Master, receive my kiss! (Passing his hand over his brow as if to wipe away the cold sweat that bathes it.) Ah!..... Visions and bugbears of children. Why do you waver, Judas?..... Come, let's enjoy life; Jesus of Nazareth never would have given me thirty pieces of silver! (He replaces the money in the purse, and starts towards the door; suddenly he stops; a groan is heard) No, I am not mistaken..... Some one is weeping, some one is sobbing (becoming terrified). Perhaps it is Jesus of Nazareth who... perhaps He has heard..... I must flee! (He starts hastily towards the door).

ESTHER, RACHEL, JUDAS.

(Pale, terrified, weeping, Rachel and Esther come out from the doorway at the side and stop Judas, who in astonishment drops the purse, making no effort to retain it.)

ESTHER. — Brother..... your eyes are bloodshot!..... where have you left Jesus of Nazareth?

RACHEL. — Your gentle Master.

JUDAS. — I know not..... Am I the guardian of Jesus? (He scowls and keeps his eyes fixed on the ground.)

ESTHER. — (Picking up the purse) You let this purse escape your hands, Judas..... It is heavy with the weight of treachery. My God!..... What frightful phantom, what vision of bloody death surrounds Thee! (She lets fall the purse) How it jangles! It sounds like the wail of a soul tortured by divine justice... Judas, whither are you going in such haste? From whom did you receive this money?...

JUDAS. — Why do you question me?... You have been spying my movements, perhaps listening to my words. You have come here hoping that your tears, your accents would make me deviate from my path. You love Jesus of Nazareth, but I, I hate Him!

RACHEL. — Hate Jesus!.. The Friend of children, the consoler of souls, the enkindler of hearts, the light of minds!.. Only the spirit of evil can hate Him!

ESTHER. — Yes, I have followed your steps... I have



listened to your words, I have endured all the shudders of indignation. Alas!.. These hands of mine have even touched the price of the betrayal. But I do not despair. I humble myself at your feet (falling to her knees) You are my brother... The same mother bore us both at her breast; the same mother's dying hand blessed us. Together we set out on the path of life, without breaking the laws of God or the precepts of honesty. And now you waver on the brink of a precipice. You voluntarily bind yourself with the chains of Satan; you have conceived and are about to carry out the most infamous of crimes.

JUDAS. — Ah! You know how to invent new terms. A God can not be killed. God can defend Himself.

ESTHER. — Listen, Judas. I remember that first day when you returned transfigured to our humble roof. Your eyes were shining. From your lips I heard words that stirred the very depths of my heart. Leaning on the window-sill of my little room, looking out upon the serene and placid night, we spoke of God. You revealed to me for the first time the name of Jesus of Nazareth... You called Him Teacher, and Master... You told me that you believed Him to be truly the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. I had a longing to see your Master; and He received me in the midst of a group of the holy women who spread His teachings. Listening to Him I realized that you had not been mistaken. A divine power made that human heart palpitate. And we loved Jesus, you and I... and were happy, and the thought of the kingdom that He promised us was our consolation. Then one fine day you came home thoughtful, you spoke ill of Peter, you began to bear rancor against John, and, at length... Alas!... your heart grew cold towards the divine Master Himself!

JUDAS. — (Picking up the purse) — I have no more time to waste. Jesus of Nazareth!.. I hate Him!... He is the enemy of our people!

ESTHER. — Wretched man!.. Speak no more of hate. Think of the many gentle answers that Jesus gave you!.. Think of the happy emotions He caused your soul!.. Think of the splendor of His miracles which attest His participation in the power of God!... No, you cannot deny the divine Master!... You have a pitying heart to make you yield to my tears...

JUDAS. — Esther, do not put obstacles in the way of my plans... Your tears are useless... I repudiate, I hate Jesus. (Starting towards the door).

ESTHER. — (Trying to detain him). No, you must

not complete the nefarious work that you have planned. I conjure you in the name of God.... in the name of our mother. You shall not be the betrayer of Him who has come to us as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Take rather my life.. if you thirst for blood, plunge your dagger in the heart of your sister... But do not touch the beloved Master!...

JUDAS. — (In a low voice) — I feel myself overcome by emotion... But no! (looking at the purse) Satan, you have conquered! (With a horrible laugh, he releases himself from his sister's clasp and rushes out.)

ESTHER. — My God!.. The sacrifice is completed!... Jesus of Nazareth!... sustain my heart... I feel it breaking with grief.... Jesus of Nazareth... have pity on me, have pity on the unfortunate man to whom I am bound by the ties of blood.... Judas, be but your true self once more.... Jesus, close my eyes, that I may no longer see the light of this world!

(She slowly sinks swooning into the arms of Rachel, who sustains her. Both fall to their knees in an attitude of prayer. In the distance is heard "Hosanna to the Son of David". The curtain slowly falls.)







## ACT II.

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### HOUSE OF PILATE

FULVIUS, SYANUS, CATO, PUBLIUS.

Two Roman soldiers with spears pass silently to and fro from one side of the stage to the other. Four others stand about a table resting against two columns at the left, playing at dice.

FULVIUS. — Dame Fortune is a stepmother to me. I never can throw a good number. (flinging the dice violently on the table.)

SYANUS. — (With a noisy laugh) Your savings are vanishing in smoke, comrade... or rather are serving to rinse the palate of an old friend of yours who is already smacking his lips over the white and pungent wine of Cana in Galilee.

CATO. — (Continuing to throw the dice) Two points more and then I am willing to rest on my laurels.

FULVIUS. — Dry laurels, by Jupiter!... That traitor of a Mercurius has swallowed I know not how many flasks of Falerno, and now has sunk into profound sleep! I am ruined... see, I place on the table my last obolus shining with the effigy of our emperor.. whom Jove preserve for many years.

SYANUS. — (Throws the dice; all watch anxiously. With a chuckle of triumph he sweeps up the money and put it into his pocket.) Your ruin is complete, Fulvius.

FULVIUS. — Mercurius cannot now have the kid that I had promised to sacrifice to him when having laid aside my arms I retire to fertile Apulia to fatten heifers.

PUBLIUS. — You are modest in your ambitions, Fulvius.

FULVIUS. — We have to be so!... What?... Do you suppose that I aspire to the post and to the consequent

vexations of Pontius Pilate, Governor of Judea?... By the way!... I saw him pass not an hour ago, while I was on guard at gate of the palace. Such a dark and angry face!... Perhaps he may have received bad news from the Senate!

SYANUS. — Oh!... he may receive exquisite Falerno from his friends in Rome.. but he won't be able to enjoy with all peace of mind the foaming beaker of white wine of Cana that the shining obolus, so generously lost by Fulvius, promises me this evening!... Certainly Pilate's face is gloomy... there are rivals here (in a low voice) who would like to fling him from his throne, accuse him even of insubordination to Rome! Now his position has become almost unendurable, because there is a Man, as you know, who is trying to reestablish the kingdom of the Jews, and who pretends to be the Son of God!

THE THREE. — (In chorus) Jesus of Nazareth!

SYANUS. — And yet... (lowering his voice)... it seems that Jesus of Nazareth is waging war against the Hebrew priests, and the latter to revenge themselves on Him are spreading the report that He is urging the people to rebel against the august majesty of Rome, and that therefore He is deserving of death. Pilate would not be averse to yield to their wishes; but it seems that Lydia, his wife, and Fulvia, his daughter, defend Jesus of Nazareth with drawn swords, and will not permit Him to be put to death. Our Governor is therefore a target for the blows of outside enemies and of persons dear to him as well!...

PUBLIUS. — And how will he get out of it?

SYANUS. — The future, my friend, is a closed book with seven seals. It is strange, nevertheless, that Pilate, who is always glad to hang and crucify the unbelievers of Judea, enemies of august Rome and of our gods, should be so wavering in granting to the people of Jerusalem the head of one Man.

FULVIUS. — But I have heard that this Man works miracles, and perhaps the miracles frighten Pilate!

SYANUS. — However that may be, we shall witness today very important events. We have received orders to report in front of the palace and to keep back with our spears the audacious one who would wish to shake off the yoke of Rome. Come, comrades, let us go. I hear the noise of approaching feet.

(They go out. The two Roman soldiers continue to walk back and forth with slow tread.)

**ESTHER, RACHEL, MARTHA, MARY MAGDALENE,  
VERONICA and OTHER WOMEN, DRESSED  
IN BLACK.**

(They enter the hall whispering, with sorrowful faces, and dispose themselves in a group in the middle of the hall.)

**MAGDALENE.** — Sisters, the hour of the sacrifice is come. I have heard from His own lips that He is to be slaughtered like an innocent lamb. His life will be crushed out; the wild beasts will suck His blood, and our hearts also will bleed from a thousand wounds!

**RACHEL.** — Oh!.. that I could give my life for the Master's! All last night the light was not extinguished in my father's room. I heard his weary steps on the floor; from time to time a sob. He would like to save Jesus; but it seems that his voice is not harkened to!

**ESTHER.** — (Softly) Oh!.. that I could say the same of the unfortunate man who has betrayed Him for a vile reward!

**MARTHA.** — But we shall have to try to save Him ourselves. We hang in ecstasy on His lips when He speaks, when He reveals to us the mysteries of His kingdom. But we are not very active. Women animated by heroism and love are capable of the greatest sacrifices. We haven't been able to snatch Jesus from the hands of His enemies, but perhaps we can influence the minds of His judges, induce Pontius Pilate not to lend his sanction to the condemnation that the Pharisees demand of him.

**VERONICA.** — We are all ready to give our blood for Jesus. But can we succeed in saving Him from that death that He Himself has predicted to us, and which will give life to the souls who wait sunken in the shadows?...

**MARTHA.** — I do not care for the fulfillment of the prophecies, I think that now our duty is to save our Master, to try any means to succeed in our project. But Lydia, Pilate's wife, may not be deaf to our prayers. She seems to be of illustrious Roman family, and a gentlewoman of exquisite feelings! Perhaps our entreaties will cause her resist the bloody rage of the Pharisees.

**RACHEL.** — And I will beg Fulvia, Pilate's daughter, to take our part. I have spoken to her only once, but she seemed to me of a mild and gentle disposition, without any trace of that pride which the Romans do display towards our race. Oh!... I am convinced that she also feels attracted by the teachings of Jesus.

VERONICA. — Shall we not go to her at once?

MAGDALENE. — Yes. Time is flying. Let us go to Pilate's house... but first let us recite the Master's prayer. Oh! the sweet prayer that we all have learned from His lips, the prayer that inspires strength in our souls, that raises our heart to God!

(The holy women prostrate themselves on the ground and chant the Lord's Prayer. The two soldiers stop in a corner and listen. A window opens in the facade of Pilate's house and a girl puts out her head, listens for a moment, and then closes the blinds again. Towards the end of the chant the holy women, led by Martha, go out, while from various directions priests, common people, men, women, children enter upon the scene. The last to arrive is Caiphas.)

CAIPHAS, NAASON, FULVIUS, JUDAS, PEOPLE.

CAIPHAS. — (The crowd surrounds him respectfully) — Brothers, at last we can draw a sigh of relief. In conformity with our laws, Jesus has been condemned. He will pay the penalty for His blasphemies. Our priests have enlightened the people, have shown that Jesus wished to make them slaves, and that His miracles are the impostures of a magician. And the people have recognized the truth of our preaching.

NASOON. — Death to the false prophet!...

FULVIUS. — Let Him be dragged away to Calvary!...

PEOPLE. — To execution, to the cross!...

CAIPHAS. — I approve the nobility of your sentiments. He who calls Himself the Son of God is worthy of death!... Be firm in your decisions.

PEOPLE. — We all want His blood!... We shall not have peace until Jesus of Nazareth is crucified!...

CAIPHAS. — All is not yet complete. We cannot put Him to death without the order of the Roman Governor, whose duty it is to judge Him and deliver Him into the hands of the executioners. We have succeeded in reducing the followers of the Nazarene to silence, but they do not yield easily. I know that they are preparing a plot, that they are using secret influence to thwart our designs. But we shall not let ourselves be dismayed by their attempts, we shall fight in defence of our people.

NAASON. — Long live our High Priest!... Death to Jesus!

CAIPHAS. — We must be prudent in order not to cause the ruin of our undertaking. We have attained our

principal aim. Jesus is in our hands. We shall not let Him escape at any cost. But the God of Israel does not desire only His captivity; he wishes a victim; He demands the blood of expiation. Have faith in your High Priest. Let us all go to Pilate. (At this moment Judas, with scowling face, enters and mingles with the crowd) He is a stranger and we shall impose on him our will. We have decided that Jesus must die. His death is necessary for us to uplift again the prestige of our priesthood which He has defamed, to recall our race to the dignity of the chosen people, to reestablish in Israel respect for our traditions. Follow me, then; support my words by your cries; in the very presence of Pilate demand even with violence that the scandal produced in Israel by Jesus shall cease.

CROWD. — We will follow you!... To the cross, to death with Jesus.

NAASON. — Let us follow our High Priest, my faithful ones. Our hatred for Jesus must be sated in a flood of blood, must extend beyond death; must strike those who surround Jesus; must wipe out all the traces of this Man who has come to overthrow our supremacy, to abjure our traditions. Let us follow Caiphas!

CROWD. — Jesus to death!... (Caiphas precedes; the priests and people follow him.)

#### JUDAS ALONE.

(He looks about him surlily, from time to time raising his hand to his brow to wipe away the cold sweat which bathes it).

JUDAS. — Alas!.. My fears, my anxieties accord with reality!... Caiphas has basely deceived me!... He wishes not only to shut Jesus up in a prison, to oppose the spread of His doctrines, he wishes His life, he wishes the blood of Him whom I called Master, of Him who turned upon me a sorrowful look of love, when with the kiss of betrayal I revealed Him to His enemies. (pause) Oh! I feel an infamous weight upon my heart. It is the thirty coins which have paid the price of the betrayal. It is the wage, the reward of the traitor (smiling bitterly). And what fruits shall I have from this money?.. It is like a fire that gnaws at my veins, that destroys my tissues. It might at least rescue Jesus from the hands of His executioners. I will go to Caiphas, I will cast myself down at his feet and with bitter tears implore the release of Jesus, I will offer him the thirty pieces that he gave me. But I am raving!... Who will grant a hearing to my words? They



will laugh at me. Judas! Why have you voluntarily descended into the abyss! And you, sister, why could you not draw me back from the death which threatens me! Oh! you have been good to me... you tried to save me. But hate and avarice have rendered vain your efforts. Jesus!... Thou dost no longer answer my call. I feel a great emptiness in my heart. Thou alone couldst fill it. But I have driven Thee away, I have repelled Thee, I have pierced Thee with the traitor's dagger. Thy gaze pursues me! Where can I hide? Where save myself from the frightful serpent which injects into my veins the poison of death... (The cry of "death to Jesus" is heard. Judas trembles, pressing his head between his hands and with a gesture of desperation departs).

**PILATE, CAIPHAS, NAASON, PEOPLE, PRIESTS,  
AND ROMAN SOLDIERS.**

(There enters a little group of Roman soldiers who with their lances take their stand in front of Pilate's house. There is a blast of trumpets. The balcony opens and Pilate, dressed in the Roman toga, shows himself to the people packed in the street below.)

PEOPLE. — Hail, O Pilate, representative of the majesty of Rome!

CAIPHAS. — Pilate, we have brought you a seducer of the people, a criminal worthy of death according to our laws. For you who represent the sovereign majesty of Rome it remains to complete the judging of this Man, or rather to permit the sentence of death to be carried out upon Him.

PILATE. — But by what crime has He rendered Himself worthy of capital punishment?

PEOPLE. — He is guilty of death... We want Him crucified.

PILATE. — But a judge before condemning a criminal must know his misdeeds. What are the crimes that you impute to Jesus?

CAIPHAS. — He has scorned our holy laws; he has scattered among the people the seeds of revolt against our priesthood.

PILATE. — Then judge Him according to your laws.

PRIESTS. — According to our laws He is deserving of death.

CAIPHAS. — We have judged Him. It remains for you to condemn Him, for you to ratify our sentence!

PILATE. — But if you choose me for your judge, it

is my duty also to examine this Man, to hear His accusers, to listen to His defense...

PEOPLE. — He has blasphemed!... He is deserving of death!

CAIPHAS. — He calls Himself the Son of God.

NAASON. — His teachings are pestilential!

PILATE. — But I can not condemn a Man to death merely because He calls Himself the Son of God. Might He not really be the son of one of our Gods? If you have no other reason to seek His death, I will not consent to your wishes. A man's life can not be sacrificed for a caprice.

CAIPHAS. — Hear me, Pilate. This Man has not only sinned against our laws, but He has also violated the laws of the Roman Empire. He has incited the people to revolt against the supreme majesty of Rome.

PEOPLE. — He is seditious!

NAASON. — He is the worst enemy of the Roman emperors!

PILATE. — But I have never heard of this revolt. In what city has it broken out?... It is only said of Jesus that He fulfills wondrous works, that He preaches doctrines that are not contrary to the majesty of Rome, and concern only your religious beliefs. If He really were guilty of the crimes that you attribute to Him, I would not have needed your information. The soldiers of Rome would have stifled in blood the slightest attempt at insurrection.

CAIPHAS. — But Jesus entered Jerusalem triumphantly, preceded and followed by an immense multitude of people, who cried as He passed, "Hosanna to the Son of David."

PILATE. — I am not ignorant of this episode, either. But good order has not been disturbed. Jesus has admirers and followers in this City, and hence it is not to be wondered at that He should be received with rejoicing.

CAIPHAS. — But He calls Himself King of Israel. He claims to be the Messiah, and the Messiah is destined to raise our people against the authority of Rome.

PILATE. — To me it matters little whether He calls Himself King or Messiah. I know very well that he has not committed any act to put into practice this dream of His royal power. I repeat to you: your accusations are not supported by the facts. To please you I am willing to examine Jesus myself, privately; I wish to question Him,

Let the prisoner be brought to me in the judgment hall.  
Do you await my reply.

PEOPLE. — Death to Jesus!..

(Pilates leaves the balcony and retires. The crowd slowly disperses).

MARY, MARTHA, RACHEL, VERONICA.

(The holy women come out of Pilate's house and sadly gather in the middle of the stage).

MARTHA. — Our efforts have been in vain, but we must not lose courage. Pilate's wife is not at home. Her servants at our questions have answered that during the night she has been agitated by feverish anxieties, by tormenting dreams and that early in the morning she went to consult the soothsayers to ask the interpretation of her troublesome visions.

MARY. — (Weeping) I fear that there is no more hope of saving our divine Master. He has said that His hour is at hand, when He is to be abandoned into the hands of His enemies; that He must offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people. If He wishes to save Himself from death He could with a single bidding of His will make Himself invisible, as happened on Mount Tabor, according to Peter, the Chief of the Apostles.

MARTHA. — Our duty is not that of interpreting and examining the designs of the Master. Even against His will we must strive, we must study the means of freeing Him from death. We must repress the anxieties of our hearts and grant a respite to our tears, in order to oppose the powerful enemies who are seeking to satisfy their thirst with the blood of the innocent.

RACHEL. — Poor Master!... How He is transformed!... How His gentle features are changed... what mortal sadness darkens His eyes!... I saw Him fleetingly from a window in Pilate's house. We all heard the howls of the wretches crying "Death to Jesus". And He, with downcast eyes, motionless, pale, seemed the personification of sorrow. His lips have remained tightly sealed. Not a word of complaint, not an angry answer to that crowd which a few days ago was singing "Hosanna" and strewing olive branches in His path. Why are the whims of the mob so fickle? Why does the popular favor destroy in a moment those whom previously it has raised up the pinnacle of the temple?

MARTHA. — We must not have fear of the mob and its caprices. As Jesus has told us so many times: Our

kingdom is not of this world. We must prepare for ourselves a kingdom in Heaven, and to attain it we shall traverse forests in which the fire rages, and rivers which in their swollen torrents drag along stones and mud. Even if Jesus shall be slain by His treacherous enemies, we shall witness His suffering, we shall catch with stricken hearts His last words, we shall dry His tears, we shall gather up from the ground the drops of blood distilled from His wounds, from His torn limbs...

**RACHEL.** — (Gradually becoming transfigured) We shall let ourselves be empurpled in the steams of blood which shall flow from His tortured heart. The hour of the sacrifice is at hand. The peaks of the mountains are veiled in dense clouds. The majestic tree stretches out its arms. (The holy women gather about Rachel and gaze at her with wonder.) Is it the Master resting there?... He sleeps, but His sleep is the sleep of death. His limbs are no longer as fair as the lilies. They are mantled with red. Jesus awakes!.. He sighs!.. His sigh is the agonized gasp of death. Jesus groans, but His groan is a word of pardon: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". But His martyrdom is brief!.. How resplendent shines the tree reddened with His blood! On His brow a crown of thorns changes into a diadem of diamonds!.. The crowd which so threateningly surrounded Him disperses. Choirs of angels, sing the Hosanna of victory. Jesus does not die. He is the Son of the Living God, who sits forever at the right hand of the Father, and all people will come for light and love to the foot of the tree which was shaken by a human tremor at the groans of His agony. (As if awaking from a dream) — The divine Master has already passed... Why have we not followed Him?...

**MARTHA.** — He has not passed, but His spirit has rested upon you, Rachel; it has entered your soul, and you have sung the glories of His triumph.

**RACHEL.** — But I have not seen these glories!.. I see only the image of Jesus. His features wrung by suffering, His eyes veiled by the thick clouds of sorrow!..

**MARY.** — And I see the tears of a Mother who awaits with ineffable anguish for more consoling news of the fate of her beloved Son.

**VERONICA.** — Since we haven't met Lydia, shall we not return to Pilate?

**MARTHA.** — But the threatening crowd which sur-

rounds the house of the Governor of Judea would render vain our attempt.

RACHEL. — But if I am not mistaken I think I recognize Fulvia in one of those two Roman ladies who are coming toward us.

MARTHA. — And I recognize Lydia. I have seen her several times in her litter in the streets of Jerusalem. God lets us meet her at an opportune moment!

### LYDIA, FULVIA AND THE HOLY WOMEN

(The two ladies are walking along, grave and thoughtful, and meeting the group of holy women endeavor to pass by; but Martha blocks their path.)

MARTHA. — Lydia, a group of women of Judea have been waiting anxiously to encounter you. Lydia, you must be aware that Roman ladies are despised by women of our religion, and that the relations between them are not cordial. We are not ignorant of it, Lydia, the time predicted by our Master has not yet come in which all the people will form a single sheep-fold, ruled by a single shepherd. But the motive is serious one which induces us to ask your aid to prevent a catastrophe which perhaps would torture with incessant remorse the soul of your husband.

FULVIA.— Let us listen, Mamma. Your dream weighs down my heart like a leaden weight. I feel as if I were under the incubus of a misfortune.

LYDIA. — I will listen to you, woman.

MARTHA. — We come to implore your support, the aid of your influence against a band of cut-throats who wish to sacrifice to their hate, to their brutal fury, the Most Just, the Most Innocent of Men! the greatest, the most learned of teachers; the most Noble, the most Lofty of Hearts, Jesus of Nazareth.

LYDIA. — My friend, you have come to add new anxieties to those that oppress my mind, that stifle my heart, that overcome my strength. I have passed a night of anguish. I seemed at every moment to perceive a man crucified, from whose pierced heart there flowed a stream of blood and this blood gushed upon the face, upon the clothing of my husband, while he, trembling, repeated continually: "I have sacrificed an innocent Man! I have betrayed my conscience! I have committed a crime!" And the blood gushed forth, gushed forth like a river and formed a reddish lake whose level kept rising until it reached my husband's breast; then mounting still higher, it rose

to his neck. My husband struggled his arms dripping blood, and seemed on the point of drowning; he invoked the aid of the crucified Man, but He remained silent. In the midst of his desperate efforts Pilate kept repeating: "I have condemned an innocent Man. The Gods are punishing me. His blood is stifling me. It is blood that that burns like a red-hot iron"! (Lydia stops with horrified eyes. Her breath fails her.) I have gone to the Roman soothsayer. He told me to bring it about that Pilate should refrain today from condemning any malefactor whatsoever...

MARTHA. — Your dream has not deceived you, Lydia. A great crime is on the point of being committed. And they are trying to make Pilate commit it!

LYDIA. — But I know him, my husband; I know the Roman nobility of his character. His is not a mind to lower itself to injustice. The law is his rule of conduct.

MARTHA. — But the enemies of Jesus are powerful. Perhaps they will succeed in drawing your husband into their plot with calumnies and threats.

LYDIA. — The Roman spirit does not yield to threats.

MARTHA. — There is no character so strong that it does not at times yield to a feeling of cowardice.

LYDIA. — What you have told me confirms for me the necessity of following the bidding of the soothsayer. The gods have revealed to me that my husband is on the point of staining his hands with innocent blood. Nevertheless, I shall bend his will, I shall be able to combat the fatal influence of those who would drag him into the mire of crime. And my Fulvia will be with me to guard the rights of innocence.

FULVIA. — Yes, mamma. Oh! how glad I shall be to help to save Jesus from the hands of those who would slay Him! You cannot imagine the fascination that the glances of Jesus exercise upon the inmost fibers of my heart. Thanks to the gods I am not a Jewess; but I assure you, mamma, that the doctrines preached by this Man seem to me superior to those of our great philosophers, even including Cato and Cicero.

LYDIA. — Let us hasten. Not a drop of blood must be shed on this day that the gods pronounce as fatal to me. Come, Fulvia. Let us implore your father to spare the life of this Man who is about to fall a victim to the fanaticism and hatred of factions... But no, here is Pilate coming towards us.

### PILATE, WOMEN.

PILATE. — (Thoughtfully talking to himself) I have lost my strength of mind. What matters to me the life of a Jew?.. Isn't this Jew a member of a race that we detest in Rome, that we do not spare in our satires, that we consider as sordid and abject?... And yet I have not the courage to condemn Him, to give Him as prey to the ferocious beasts who would tear Him to pieces. Strange!.. This Man has only answered me a few words..... but His gaze..... Strange!..... I fear those eyes that penetrate to the most remote recesses of my soul. He calls Himself the Son of God!... Certainly the epithet is absurd, but there is something divine in the light of His eyes. Shall I yield?.. I have never been so perplexed in my life.

LYDIA. — Pilate!..

PILATE. — (with a start). — Lydia, you here! I thought you intent upon your domestic duties!

LYDIA. — Grave fears and anxieties have taken me from my household gods. A frightful dream has overwhelmed my soul with anguish. I have interrogated the soothsayer! Today is fatal for you, for your family, perhaps for imperial Rome itself! The gods desire no victims, and do not wish your hands to be stained with blood.

PILATE. — Do not fear, Lydia. I do not believe in dreams, but I am convinced of the innocence of the Man whose death is demanded of me with treacherous insistence by the Jews. The sinews of my heart are still profoundly shaken by the words which this Man has answered me. To me He seems a demi-God, and I pity bitterly His fate.

LYDIA. — But you took Him out of the hands of His enemies?

MARTHA. — We beg for His life, Pilate. He is a just Man who preaches the doctrine of life. Oh!.. if everyone would hearken to His words, the light of Heaven would shine on every mind!

PILATE. — I do not believe in the philosophical doctrines of the Jews. Jesus told me He is the truth, but I do not know what He means by the truth. I repeat, however, that I am convinced of His innocence. Nevertheless, I have had to sacrifice Him in part to the fury of His enemies.

FULVIA. — Sacrifice Him!.... Yet father, you said just now that you did not doubt His innocence! If Jesus is not guilty of any crime why punish Him?....

PILATE.— Reasons of State and political expediency

require at times that one grant even the criminal desires of the mob. To relieve myself of any responsibility, I told them to take Jesus to Herod, and have him judge Him. But Herod sent Him back to me. Then I gave orders to have Him scourged by the soldiers and I hope that this exemplary punishment will excite a feeling of compassion in the hearts of His enemies, and will suggest to them more gentle counsels.

MARTHA. — You deceive yourself, Pilate. The hatred of the Pharisees is never satiated with blood. The sight of Jesus scourged will render them even more firm in their plans to contemplate Jesus crucified.

MARY. — I thought that the characters of the representatives of Rome were more energetic! Innocence should be defended, even against the fury and wickedness of crowds thirsting for blood; it has the right to be revenged if trampled upon and offended.

PILATE. — Woman, Rome knows how to defend the rights of her subjects. But we are sparing of our blood when we must shed it for a race that hates us, and which the whole world abhors. The agitation against Jesus is not a movement that offends the sovereign majesty of Rome. Only a feeling of pity has impelled me to take up the defence of this Nazarene, who by proclaiming Himself the Son of God has excited against Himself all the fire and the inextinguishable hatred of your priests. It does not seem to me fitting that I should take part in this conflict, whose causes elude me. I repeat that I will do my best to save Jesus; but you must plead His cause before your priests, not in the presence of the representative of Rome.

FULVIA. — Daddy, I also beseech you in the name of the innocence of this Man.. It matters little that He has not in His veins the blood of Roman citizens. His fate arouses a great pity in my soul. Alas!... I conjure you by the affection which you bear me, I conjure you in the name of my mother whom the torturing dreams of last night have disturbed so much, have plunged into indescribable anxieties, I pray you, save Jesus!

RACHEL. — And if the voice of a little girl, who in Jesus venerates her Master, who in converse with Jesus has found the greatest happiness of her youthful life, if the voice of a little girl can reach your noble heart, Pilate, I beseech you not to yield to the violence of the enemies of Jesus. There is so much gentleness hidden away in the heart of my divine Master, so much luminous goodness



shining in His eyes, so much intense kindness in the tones of His voice revealing the secrets of another life, that by taking part in the condemnation of Jesus you would sully with infamy the Roman name, and draw down upon your head the maledictions of the gods.

PILATE. — (in a low voice) Truth and justice speak through the lips of these women. But shall I have the strength to oppose the swelling river that threatens to overthrow me? (There is heard in the distance the voices and the boisterous laughter of the soldiers, and the Pharisees crying, "Long live the New King of Israel! Put the purple on Him!... Strike with your staves His crown of thorns. Death to Jesus! Turning back to the women, Pilate continues) Listen to that, my friends. It is not Rome that tortures your Prophet, it is your own people. The sufferings that are being inflicted on Jesus are maledictions of God that will come back upon your race. Go, nevertheless, and I will try to save Jesus at any cost, and if I do not succeed, I will not stain my hands with innocent blood.

(Pilate, Lydia, Fulvia set out in the direction of their house; the other women disperse weeping. Rachel and Esther alone remain, as if petrified by grief. They retire into a corner and pray).

#### CAIPHAS, NAASON, JUDAS.

(Caiphas slowly comes on the stage, animatedly discussing with Naason).

CAIPHAS. — We have not yet succeeded in our aim. Jesus is in our hands but He still lives. What matters it that He is humiliated; that His bleeding shoulders show the marks of grievous blows; that streams of blood flow from His forehead, crowned with thorns? His soul is inflexible. His triumph is greater in suffering than in joy. The popular favor changes in a brief compass of time. I seem already to discern signs of compassion of the faces of those who a little while ago, were crying, "Death to the Nazarene!"... We must hasten, otherwise our plans will come to naught. (Judas enters with anxious eyes, with strained face, with signs of desperation on his features.)

NAASON. — Pilate must grant our demands. If our persuasion is not effective, we will strike fear into his heart. Jesus is reduced to a poor human tatter. One more effort and He will be rent to atoms. Our priests are seeking to stifle the feeling of pity that is beginning to creep into the people. (In the distance is heard the cry, "Let

Him be crucified, let Him be crucified.”) Hark, the popular fury is reawakening; let us not lose time. Let us go and fight the last battle with Pilate. Jesus must die!

CAIPHAS. — I can not sleep peacefully until He has paid by His death for His hatred against us.

JUDAS. — (With a voice of despair.) Ah!.. The tortures of the damned! (With hasty steps, he hurries towards Caiphas, plants himself motionless in front of him, and contemplates him with eyes burning with hate). Caiphas!.. It is you who decide the death of Jesus.

CAIPHAS. — Who gives you the right to interfere in our decisions, in the discussion of priests? You rendered us a service of your own free will, you delivered into our hands Him whom you formerly called Master. You cannot deny that you received a fitting reward. We gave you a recompense that is rarely granted to traitors!..

JUDAS. — The flames of Hell!.. But you, Caiphas, you promised me, you assured me, that Jesus would only be thrown into prison. The recompense that you gave me is not the price of blood. It is the price of the liberty of Jesus. Now keep your word. You wish the death of Jesus, but think that I alone, I alone will be responsible for this murder... I alone, who with a kiss of infamy cast Jesus into the sacrilegious hands of your cut-throats like the vilest of enemies!..

CAIPHAS. — I repeat, Judas, you have received your reward. You have nothing more to claim!..

JUDAS. — But it is not Jesus alone who is betrayed. I am the victim of still blacker treachery. The reward!.. I do not want these thirty pieces of silver stained with blood. Here they are, I return them to you. (Throwing the purse scornfully on the ground). Take your money and restore Jesus to liberty. I am even ready to be your slave. But I do not want Jesus to perish, stricken by my hand. It is true that I betrayed Him, but I do not want Him to die.

NAASON. — You are raving, Judas: we have no need of your money either. The fate of Jesus is decided and you cannot change it. Accept the counsel of a friend; take the money, invest it, you will become rich, and will deny Jesus and His caprices.

JUDAS. — I demand the liberty of Jesus: I insist that you be faithful to your compact. I have delivered Jesus to you, but you must respect His life. Take back your money! (He again takes the purse and throws it with suppressed fury at the feet of Caiphas.)

CAIPHAS. — This man is crazy. Come let us leave

him with his madness, perhaps with his remorse. We are not responsible for the treason he has committed against a friend. (They go out).

### JUDAS ALONE.

JUDAS. — (Trampling on the purse with an insane laugh) Gold!... The price of treason!... It seems like a brand from Hell!.. It is red... but... yes, it is red with blood! (As if perceiving a terrible vision he opens his eyes and tears his hair) It is the blood.... of Jesus of Nazareth! (With a sorrowful voice) The Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.... the Victim of the sacrifice slain upon the altar. (Pauses: then as if awaking from a dream). Unfortunate wretch!... In what obscure corner will you hide your shame, the blood that stains your hands, the horror that exudes from your person? Oh earth! why didst thou not engulf me alive, why didst thou not drag me into thy profound depths, why didst thou not cast my body into a tomb hollowed out of the hardest of thy rocks in thy impenetrable abysses! For a wretched pittance I have betrayed the most Just of men. Oh! base hatred born of envy, inspired by avarice, does not blind me to the point of not recognizing the innocence of Jesus!... I have betrayed Jesus... the cruel tortures inflicted on His limbs are the product of my shortsighted hate!... It is I who have torn the flesh of my divine Master with pointed scourges; It is I who have fastened on His head a crown of thorns!.. It is I who in a little while perhaps will stretch Him out on the cross, will pierce His hands and feet with iron nails, will make Him suffer the most shameful of punishments! Judas!.. You are a butcher!... (He pauses) Can I ever again face the looks of men? Can I again smile at the smiles of Nature, of the heavens, of honest souls? Can I ever again move a step in these paths whose grains of sand will seem to me all imbued with the blood of Jesus.... (With a gesture of despair he presses his forehead between his hands. Rachel and Esther, who have been anxiously following his movements, approach. Judas does not perceive them.)

### JUDAS, RACHEL, ESTHER.

ESTHER. — Judas, are there still eyes whose gaze you can face?

JUDAS. — (With a bewildered, uncertain look) Who speaks to me?... I seem to hear a familiar voice... a voice

sweet and gentle, the voice of my mother in the first years of my childhood!..

ESTHER. — It is the voice of your sister who is praying for you.

JUDAS. — Oh! why was I born?.. Why had the earth to see in me the blackest monster of iniquity?... Why did the mother who gave me life not strangle me in the cradle!...

ESTHER. — Do not blaspheme, brother. There are still eyes that are fixed lovingly on you, there is still a Heart which throbs with the beating of mercy.

RACHEL. — There is still a Friend who keeps for you words of gentleness. There is still a Master who will answer the kiss that was the sign of your treason, with a kiss that shall be the symbol of pardon! Perhaps Jesus awaits you!... He loves to draw to His heart those who have tortured Him!... Souls inflamed with pride, souls black with guilt, souls stained with shameful crimes are not rejected by Jesus... His blood bathes all the wounds of the heart. The bitter tears of repentance purify besmirched souls!...

JUDAS. — (Still with fixed, scowling gaze) Jesus purifies, but I have reduced Him to impotence. I can no longer break the iron circle of His enemies that hides Him from my view.. I am His jailer. I am the opprobrium of the human race. It is I that have snatched Him from my brethren, have loaded Him with chains, have exposed Him to the insults of the rabble, have dragged Him through the streets of Jerusalem, once resounding with the songs of His glory, have dragged Him as the vilest of evil-doers, as the antipathy of the people. (There is heard in the distance the cry, "Death to Jesus") Ah!.. Hell is yawning at my feet! An acrid smoke of sulphur is smothering me!... Judas, why did you betray the Son of Man!...

RACHEL. — Do not heed the suggestions of the enemy of your soul! Remember the goodness of the divine Master who in His life knows only the sweetness of love. Weep for your sin, Judas, but do not despair! Oh! hasten to meet Jesus with sincere repentance, traverse the crowd that surrounds Him; he will press you to His bosom, and will say to you, "I have found the sheep that was lost."

JUDAS. — There is no longer any hope!.. Repent!... But my crime surpasses in horror all the crimes in the world!.. There is no forgiveness for him who has betrayed the Son.... No, I dare not pronounce the sublime word; like a flaming dart it sets my veins afire... Jesus is dragged to

death, and I am His executioner, His crucifier!... He spoke to me of Love and I have answered with words of hate!... And there is no executioner to punish me for my misdeed! (He pauses).

ESTHER. — (Bewildered) Judas, there is no executioner, but there is a Redeemer!... Your sin is horrible, but the tender mercy of Jesus blots out a multitude of iniquities. Come with me, let us go to Jesus. Oh!... you will see the pitiful hand which shall cure your ills! His blood will be a soothing balm for your wounds!...

JUDAS. — (Starting) Blood... Blood cries for vengeance!... An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!... He who was the executioner of others shall be his own executioner!

ESTHER. — Do not utter these terrible blasphemies.. collect yourself. The Father is the God of mercy; he is not the God of revenge.

JUDAS. — (Rolling his eyes) The hour of destiny is at hand... Behold the serpent that enfolds me in its coils. (He encircles his neck with his hands) How slippery it is, how cold! It extends its coils about my neck. Its poison penetrates into my veins... No, I cannot endure its dreadful touch! Life, the infamous burden of life, I here renounce... I detest, I curse this human semblance that covers me. Oh, diabolical serpent... contract, contract my arteries.. enfold me, stifle me, stifle me... you are slow in your twisting movements... perhaps you wish to make me suffer more. But no!... I no longer can suffer the barbarities of your cruelty. I will be swifter than you. Satan, you summon me, I hasten, I fly to meet you. (There is heard "Let Jesus be crucified" from the people.) Death to Jesus..... And death to the traitor likewise..... Satan, hasten the end of my suffering! (He rushes off the stage and disappears, while Esther, after having tried in vain to follow and detain him, falls on her knees and covers her face with her hands. Rachel raises her up tenderly and leads her away, exclaiming)

RACHEL. — Jesus, have pity on those who suffer... Jesus, do not condemn to everlasting death the sinner, but instill into him Thy life!...

CAIPHAS, AZAR, ZACCHEUS, NAASON, PRIESTS.

CAIPHAS. — My friends, let us set to work again. Very soon Jesus will again be in the presence of Pilate. We shall demand His death; Azar will support us with his aid and his influence.

AZAR. — I decline the commission. I have undergone

a very hard struggle with my conscience. I have hesitated, I have wept, I have cursed Jesus, I have considered His teachings, I have heard the cries of hate uttered against Him. I have wondered at the divine patience of this Man who, wounded, beaten, scoffed at, does not lose His calm; He has turned His eyes upwards to Heaven; He never abandons His spirit of meekness; He seems more absorbed in a vision of Heaven than in the spectacle of the evils and miseries of the earth. I know not who this Man is; I know not what secret power inspires this alleged Son of the smith of Nazareth. But after having seen Him as a victim bleeding in the hands of His executioners, I dare not condemn Him. Jesus is innocent... perhaps He is only a man, but at least He is a man whose equal is not upon the earth. To me He seems invested with a divine mission. I venerate our priesthood, but I am unwilling to participate in a deed which I do not hesitate to call a crime. I believe in the glorious mission, the superhuman mission of Jesus of Nazareth; and I prostrate myself before this Man whom you deride as a madman, and scoff at and insult as a criminal.

CAIPHAS. — You, too, an advocate of this impostor? For shame, Azar.

(The priests utter angry cries of protest).

PRIESTS. — He, too, would betray us, he also enters the ranks of the followers of the Nazarene; he likewise becomes an enemy of our race.

ZACCHEUS. — Say, rather, the defender of justice and innocence, the guardian of the Prophet whom God sends us to save us from ruin!

NAASON. — You will not succeed in shaking the faith of the people in us. We are the representatives of God, and the people are but a plaything in our hands. We have decided to make Jesus pay with His life for the revolt which He has plotted against our authority, and we will carry out our intention.

AZAR. — You are free in your actions. You can carry out your crimes with impunity, under the mask of your pharisaical zeal. Go forward into the paths of perdition. Azar will not follow you! Oh! that my eyes had been opened to the light before.... I might have succeeded in snatching this victim from your hate. Perhaps now I will be condemned to be a helpless witness of His martyrdom. But I repeat to you, O Pharisees, O ye priests who torture Jesus instead of adoring Him, I repeat to you, that this Man comes from God, and that I shall be ready even to

prostrate myself at the foot of the cross, which He will bathe with His blood! (Voices still nearer cry — “Crucify Him... Behold the Jester-King... Behold the Son of God... Behold the Descendant of David!”)

CAIPHAS. — May the curse of the God of Israel fall on Azar and his family. Cursed be he who impedes our plans. (Azar departs, scornfully). The people are approaching. Jesus is again brought to Pilate. Let us make the last attempt. We shall overcome the reluctance of Pilate, and the death of Jesus shall free us from the danger of losing the favor of the people. (The mob slowly presses upon the stage and crowds together in front of Pilate's house, the balcony of which is closed. Caiphas and his priests placed themselves in a circle in the front rank. While they are waiting, Naason circulates through the crowd gesticulating and shouting).

NAASON. — Be tireless... do not cease to shout “Death to Jesus”, and to threaten Pilate. The death of Jesus means the salvation of Israel, the prelude to the kingdom which God promises our race.

**PILATE, CROWD, PRIESTS, CAIPHAS,  
NAASON, ANNA.**

(The balcony opens, Pilate appears to the crowd, with a scribe at his right hand, and at his left two Roman Counselors dressed in the toga.)

PILATE. — (Pointing with his hand in front of himself toward a group of soldiers who stand at the mouth of the street surrounding Jesus, who cannot be seen by the audience, exclaims) Oh Jews, let your enmity be satisfied. Behold the Man upon whom converge the torrents of your hate. Behold Jesus of Nazareth, whom you feared as the seducer of the people. What plot can this Man, bleeding, dying, mocked at, derided, carry out against you?.... His last hour is already at hand, and a natural death, not a violent one, will satisfy your rancor.

PEOPLE. — We do not wish to see the false Prophet any longer in our midst!

NAASON. — Today Israel covers itself with glory.

CAIPHAS. — The sun of justice bursts forth and illumines our people.

PRIESTS. — Pilate, all our people are with us, you cannot oppose the will of a nation. We demand the death of Jesus.

NAASON. — (Turning towards the people) Be tenacious, be constant, and victory will be ours.

PEOPLE. — Crucify Jesus! To death with the impostor, to death with the false Messiah!

PILATE. — But I can not pronounce this sentence because Jesus has committed no crime. Look at Him, behold your Man. He inspires more pity than hate!

PEOPLE. — We appeal to Caesar. Pilate protects the enemies of Caesar, those who preach insurrection and sow discord.

CAIPHAS. — Why, oh Pilate, do you refuse to subscribe to a sentence of death against a single man, you who not long for a few seditious cries had hundreds of children massacred by your soldiers?

(Pilate is silent.)

NAASON. — We can no longer answer for the patience of our people. If the Derider and Scornor of our laws, of our faith, of our rites, is not condemned to death, the people of Jerusalem will rebel, and you will be responsible to Caesar for the revolt. (Pilate, perplexed, turns to his counselors and questions them in a low voice. The people continue to clamor: "To Calvary, to the Cross!")

PILATE. — You crave blood. You wish to watch a man expire in agony. Well... I offer you as a spectacle the execution of Barabbas, the robber who has terrorized you with his unspeakable crimes. Let Jesus go free, and I will give you Barabbas.

PEOPLE. — Long live Barabbas!.. To death with Jesus!..

CAIPHAS. — Barabbas is a common criminal who has killed a few unfortunates; but Jesus wishes to sacrifice our race. He has poisoned the people with His doctrines.

PRIESTS. — Let Barabbas be set free!.. We prefer Barabbas to Jesus!..

PILATE. — But what must I do with the King of the Jews!

PEOPLE. — To the cross; to Calvary!..

(Pilate consults his counselors; then, with a gesture of determination, turning on the people a look of scorn and beckoning to a servant inside the house, he exclaims)

PILATE. — Bring hither some water.

CAIPHAS. — Our priests cannot longer restrain the righteous impatience of the multitude. Condemn Jesus to death, or the people inspired by a just fury will make rivers of blood run in the streets of Jerusalem!

PILATE. — I yield to your violence... But I am not responsible for this crime. I declare to you that Jesus of



Nazareth is innocent. You wish to sate yourselves with His blood, pretending that your God imposes upon you this hateful sacrifice. Very well, I wash my hands of it (Washing his hands) I am not willing to stain them with innocent blood. I protest against this injustice, against the murder that you are on the point of committing. Take Jesus, and crucify Him. May His blood, may His death be upon you!

PRIESTS. — His blood be upon us, and upon our children! We wish the death of Jesus.

PILATE. — You say it and I repeat it. May the blood of Jesus be upon you, upon your children, upon your race! The odium of this crime cannot be imputed to Rome nor to Pontius Pilate. You are the judges and you the executioners of Jesus, and His blood shall be on your heads and upon the heads of your children!

PEOPLE. Upon us and upon our children!

PRIESTS. — Long live Pilate!... Long live the justice of Rome!....

PILATE. — The justice of Rome is not to be confounded with the iniquity which you are committing. It is you who pronounce the death sentence of Jesus.

PEOPLE. — We and our children.

PILATE. — (Turning to the scribe) Lasinius, draw up the sentence of death. Make note that I sign it in consequence of the tumultuous demands, the urgings of the High Priest, the Sanhedrim, and the people of Judea. "That Jesus be crucified between two criminals." I retire in order no longer to witness the nauseating spectacle of this multitude drunk with blood. (He reenters the house with his counselors. The balcony remains open. The scribe is intent on drawing up the sentence.)

CAIPHAS. — We have conquered!... The ephemeral power of Jesus is overthrown. The priesthood of Israel is triumphant!....

ANNA. — The death of this Man will be the salvation of Israel.

PEOPLE. — Day of rejoicing!... Day of triumph!

NAASON. — My friends.... soon the cross will be erected on the summit of Calvary, and you will be able to convince yourselves of the imposture of Jesus. He has spread the report that He will not die! You shall see Him die like the commonest evildoer!

PEOPLE. — Long live the Synagogue!... Long live our priests! To death with the Galilean!

CAIPHAS. — Our Pasch will be a Pasch of joy. Let us go and celebrate it, returning thanks to the Most High

who shatters the power of the enemies of His chosen people.

PEOPLE. Long live the High Priest!... To death with the Galilean! (The crowd slowly disperses. The scribe impassably continues to write. When the last of the crowd are about to disappear, Lydia and Fulvia approach the balcony and turn their gaze upon it.)

LYDIA, FULVIA, SCRIBE.

LYDIA. — What are you writing, Lasinius?

LASINIUS. — (With an indifferent air) The death sentence of Jesus of Nazareth, of Him who claimed to be the King of the Jews.

LYDIA and FULVIA. — The death sentence?... and who pronounced it?...

LASINIUS. — To tell the truth, the Jews pronounced it, and especially their priests. Pilate affixed his name, but he has protested that he yields to threats of violence.

LYDIA. — (With a gesture of desperation) Eternal infamy on our name!.. Poor Fulvia!...

FULVIA. — Do not despair, mother. Father has been weak; he fears a revolt. But he has declared that he did not countenance the death of Jesus. The blood of the innocent will not be upon our heads. You know my father's nobility of soul. Oh!.. I am convinced of it... He will be able to redeem in a worthy manner the error he has committed and will one day perhaps be one of the greatest admirers of Jesus!

LYDIA. — No!... An eternal infamy, the infamy of cowardice, will weigh down our souls!..

FULVIA. — Mother, we will all remedy the fault. If it is necessary we will even give our blood to wash away our shame. A secret presentiment warns me that Jesus will be great, greater still after His death. He will be the greatest of our Gods. Come!... Perhaps we shall see marvelous things at the moment of His death... Perhaps dying He will exercise on our hearts that mysterious fascination that He exerts upon His followers.

LYDIA. — May Heaven hearken to you, my daughter, and may your father not have to weep bitterly for this unworthy act. (They enter the house, followed by the scribe. The balcony is closed. People pass hurriedly in front of Pilate's house. Azar and Rachel come upon the scene and stop in the middle of the stage. Rachel is weeping; Azar is thoughtful).

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## ACT III.

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### GARDEN OF VERONICA'S HOME

#### MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS.

MARY. — Jerusalem, why dost thou persecute the Prophet whom God has sent thee to save thee from the destruction which threatens thy children?... How sweet is thy name!.. How sacred are thy memories!.. What gentle delights thou dost instill into hearts that live in God! How fervent is the prayer that is poured out within the enclosure of thy walls!.. How majestic are the recesses of thy temple which the Most High visits in the splendor of His glory!... How flowery are thy paths, which still preserve the traces of the wanderings of that Son who by divine power felt the first stir of life within my maternal bosom. (A pause: Mary looks towards heaven and her features become sorrowful) My Son!.. He is the Son of the Living God!.. But He is my Son! My blood flows in His veins; He has smiled at me from the cradle of my arms: His little baby head which surpassed in beauty the faces of the angels has rested on my breast; from His lips I have heard the words of Eternal Life. He has obeyed my commands. He has revealed to me the splendors of the life of the Father. (Pause) Jesus!.. I am Thy mother, Thy mother who comes to comfort Thee in the hour of Thy danger with the consolation of a tender mother-love. It is the hour of danger! How human fortunes change!... Joy was filling my heart at the thought that Thou hadst entered in triumph this City that often has heard the voice of the prophets! But human joy is a flash of lightning that in a moment is followed by the sound of groans and sighs!.... Thou art not yet come to intoxicate me with the sweetness of Thy divine gaze, with those words that pierce the clouds and penetrate even to the throne of God! The Pha-

risees are persecuting Thee, thy enemies betray Thee, the multitude shrieks savage cries against Thee, the chosen people deny that any Man has accomplished on earth the marvels that Thou dost accomplish!... My mother's eyes beseech a glance from Thee, Jesus!... I know that Thou dost but fulfill the works of Thy Father, that I ought not to place obstacles in Thy path, that I have not even the right to clear of thorns the paths that Thou dost tread!... that perhaps tomorrow, when the hour of sacrifice shall have arrived, I shall have to renounce even the joy of saving Thee, of dying at Thy feet a victim of love and grief, blessing in Thee my God and my Son!... But I am Thy mother, oh Jesus!... Every sinew of my heart trembles at pronouncing that name, for me a symbol of the mystical mingling of love and of sorrow!... Oh, Jesus!... have pity on a Mother! Jesus, most gentle and meek of the sons of men, have pity on me, if perhaps the sacrifice which Thou dost impose on my material love surpasses my strength to bear!... I would gladly shed the last drop of my blood to fulfill the work of redemption that Thy father has entrusted to Thee, but I would spare Thee the tortures of the sacrifice!

**THE BLESSED VIRGIN, MARTHA, MAGDALENE,  
RACHEL**

(They enter and surround Mary affectionately. Rachel kisses her and remains kneeling at her feet, holding Mary's hand in hers).

MARY. — Oh, how my heart trembles!.. I read on your face the marks of grief!... How penetrating are maternal anxieties!... Jesus! You have left Him in the hands of His enemies!...

MARTHA. — Oh!... He has yielded Himself into their hands like an innocent lamb.

MARY. — And no one has arisen to save Him!

MARTHA. — Perhaps His salvation will come from despicable Gentiles. Pilate has publicly undertaken the defense of Jesus, of Thy Son, oh Mary!... The Pharisees have been confounded. We cherish the hope that he will be able to resist the violence of the mob, misled by the fury of the priests.

MARY. — (As if speaking to herself) Yet my divine Son... He is the High Priest!... and it is the priests who prepare his fetters, who are tigers thirsting for His blood!... The Pharisees!.. Oh!.. Well did my divine Son characterize them: "Race of vipers!".. May their crimes

not be upon the heads of the innocent!... May Jerusalem not weep one day over the ruin wrought by those who today feign to be her defenders!.. But.. Jesus!.. Where have you left Him!..

MAGDALENE — (Weeping) Mother, may your heart be strong as rock, as the steel tempered by the intense heat of the fiery furnace! Mother, the hour of sacrifice is approaching!... Jesus is hidden from your eyes. His blood, alas, is flowing in streams down His cheeks!

MARY. — (With an expression of intense grief) His blood!.. Jesus!.. Innocent victim!.. Blood that Thou didst derive from my veins.

MAGDALENE. — Not yet is He truly a victim... But soon He will be perhaps. His soul is supremely beautiful and divinely luminous, but His human semblance is wrung by suffering... His eyes shine with the inextinguishable light of God... but the pallor of death mars the beauty of His features!

MARY. — My heart bleeds!.. I have lived in anguish from the first moment in which a mystic voice called me Blessed amongst women, because in my body there dwelt the Only-Begotten Son of the Almighty. Visions of death rendered less keen the joy that the celestial smile of Jesus enkindled in my soul. But the glance of my Beloved Son strengthened my soul, repressed my anxieties. Now I am alone!.. How unhappy is the soul that does not hear the gentle voice of my Son! how unhappy, how sorrowful, the soul that does not contemplate the sweet face of Jesus!... Poor mother-heart pierced by the sword of grief!... I do not see Thee, Jesus, with the eyes of my body; but my soul perceives Thee in the distance, falling, weakened under the weight of Thy sufferings!... Victim that dost not utter a word against Thy executioners: King that dost not with a nod destroy the bands of Thy enemies; Priest that desirest to offer Thyself as a sacred victim on the sacrificial altar!... Jesus! Why Thou not yield to me Thy torments?.. Thy blood blots out human iniquities; but if Thy blood is derived from my veins, could I not mingle mine with Thine, rest with Thee upon the stone of the sacrifice, and share the work of redemption that the Father lays upon Thee?...

RACHEL. — Mother of Jesus!.. You are our mother, as Jesus is our Master!... (She becomes exalted, her eyes shine) My tears would moisten like a balm the wounds of your mother love!.. I would renounce all my smile to calm a single one of your anxieties!... Mother! you suffer with

Jesus, you suffer with our Master, and the secret sorrows of your heart would draw tears from the very stones!... But you share with Jesus in our salvation!... You raise yourself to heaven in the sublime heights of the sacrifice of your maternal love, and there shall come a day in which the generations of man shall call you blessed; in which diadems of jewels, of precious stones, shall encircle your brow! A day in which your royal palace shall surpass in splendor and richness the imperial halls of Rome! And you who weep, you who feel your heart torn with suffering, you shall be the mother of all those that sorrow, you shall see at your feet an immense throng of broken souls that shall come to ask your pity, and you shall bathe them with the blood that well from your heart and from the lacerated heart of your divines Son, and shall give them the pulsations of life. (Mary stretches out her hand, rests it on the head of Rachel, who seems rapt in an ecstasy.)

MARY. — May the spirit of my Son remain always in your heart, Rachel!... It is not glory that I ask.... I am the humble hand-maid of the Lord!.... I wish to contemplate my Beloved, I wish to wipe away His tears; perhaps wipe away the blood from His wounds!.... weep with me, ye daughters of Zion; follow Him even into the paths of infamy, into the paths of suffering; snatch Him by main force even from the hands of His slayers!.... Ah woe!.... Women of Zion, where have you left my Beloved?.... (There is heard a confused murmur of discordant voices; from time to time some one shouts "Long live Pilate! Death to the Impostor!" "Let us hasten to Calvary!" Mary rises and turns an anxious glance in the direction from which the voices come. A brief pause; Peter and John enter, breathless.)

#### MARY, JOHN, PETER, RACHEL

MARY. — John, you who rest on the heart of my Son, calm my maternal anguish!... Where have they taken the Blessed Fruit of my womb? Is the hatred of the Pharisees not yet sated?.... And why does not my Son with the power of His word baffle their treachery, cast down their pride, unmask their hypocrisy?..

JOHN. — (With a sigh and wiping away his tears) Mary, everything proclaims that the hour of the sacrifice, of the immolation, has arrived! My heart bleeds, my eyes are dimmed with weeping, my throat is dry with sobs. I have followed the footsteps of my Master, of the Son who has come to scatter the darkness from the face of those

who sit in the shadows of death, and I fear that overcome by grief, I may not be able to follow Him up to the altar of the sacrifice.

PETER. — I have sought to oppose with violence the violence of the Master's enemies. I have tried with craft to take Jesus from their hands, to hide Him, to wait until the storm has passed, to go to some other country, because no prophet is well received in his own land. But my attempts have not succeeded. The calm, steady, penetrating glance of the Master warns me that the hour predicted by Him is at hand. We must bow to His will. We must be helpless witnesses of the horrible crime that is being perpetrated in the Holy City. We must contemplate with the agony of death the shedding of the innocent blood of a just Man; of that blood which shall be upon the heads of the poor children of Israel, upon this City that God has chosen as the scene of His wondrous works!

MARY. — Peter! John! Your words plunge me again into strange terror! The blood freezes in my veins. All the fibers of my heart tremble!.... How poignant are the sorrows of a mother's hearth!.... Oh! Father, Who art in Heaven!..... My spirit is ready for the sacrifice!.... But the heart of a mother is always weak-weak and heroic at the same time, when the desire of lessening the sufferings of the child of her bosom inspires it. Oh, our Father, Who art in Heaven, give me strength, give power to the sinews of my wounded heart.... Give me above all the sorrowful joy of being able to comfort the sufferings of Jesus, Thy Son in Heaven, and my Son on earth; Give me the sorrowful joy of sacrificing myself on the same altar, of sharing the mission of redemption that He is fulfilling amongst men..... John! Where have you left Jesus?....

JOHN. — Alas!.... Do you not hear, oh Mother of sorrows, do you not hear the voices of hate that cry out but a short distance away, that in a few moments will pierce like the sharpest sword your mother's breast.... (The crowd cries "To Calvary!" Long live Pilate! To death with the false prophet!.... Long live Barrabbas")

MARY. — (With a look of great suffering, looking towards Heaven, raising her clasped hands, with heart rending tones) Ah!.... They are cries of hatred towards my Son!.... Poor Victim, Who hast scattered Thy benefits with open hand, Who hast redeemed so many souls with the warmth of Thy grace, Who hast opened so many eyes long closed to the light that cometh from on high, Who hast poured such balm upon the wounds of human bodies,



Who hast brought back peace to so many hearts deceived by human illusions!.... They wish Thy death!.... But why "to Calvary?"

JOHN. — Mary, shield thy heart again with a buckler of adamant. They do not wish only the death of the Master!... They wish that infamy, that dishonor should sully the name of the Just!... As if an atom of earthly mire could stain the immaculate splendor of the Sun!... Calvary, Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the hill upon which criminals pay the price of their crimes, and upon this hill is erected the cross upon which will die in agony my Master, Son of the Living God. (Bursting into tears).

MARY. — (Falling on her knees) Alas!... Heart of a mother, do not break!... Be strong!... Heart of a mother, do not let escape every drop of your blood, do not cease your beating, do not paralyze all your fibers!... Glory to the Most High, Who leadeth to the sacrifice His only begotten Son!.... Oh heart of a mother, bend to the will of the Almighty, drain to the very bottom the chalice of grief.... Oh, hateful Tree!.... The holy Victim stretches out His arms to you!...

RACHEL. — (As if in ecstasy) Oh majestic Tree!... Tree radiant with light!... (If possible there is sung the "*Arbor decora fulgida*", while the holy women and the two apostles, kneeling, raise their hands to Heaven) Oh Tree that dost gather about its feet the billows of humanity redeemed!... Oh bloody Tree which shall be the seat of knowledge and of light through all the future generations!.... Thou art not the mark of shame!.. Thou art not the instrument of infamy!... From thee flows the purest glory; from thy dry wood springs the living fountains of immortality... Stand erect on the height of Calvary.. do not tremble with fright at the horrible blasphemies uttered against the Victim Who by the touch of His Body gives light to thy withered fibers; impregnate thyself with that blood which washes away all the shame of sinful humanity; enfold Jesus gently with thy rough arms!... Oh Majestic Tree, resplendent Tree, stretch forth thy inanimate arms over all the people, over the highest peaks and the lowest abysses, empurple all souls with the blood that drips from thy fibers. Oh Cross, gibbet of ignominy, thou shalt become the only hope of those who suffer, who weep, who hate life, who are enfeebled by the weight of misfortune, who are the victims of calumny, of hate, of wickedness. (If possible, there is sung "*O crux ave spes unica*")

MARY. — (Rising) To Calvary!... O sweet features

of my Son!.. that my eyes may look upon ye once more!...  
May Thy dear face remain imprinted upon my memory  
as a picture traced in blood...

VERONICA, MARY, JOHN, RACHEL

VERONICA. — Mother of Jesus!... I have heard your last words!... I am exhausted by my emotions, my tears, my grief!... Oh, the heart-rending spectacle.. Jesus.. Thou art truly the Son of God, with Thy divine calm, with Thy blessed smile even in the midst of tortures, with Thy heroic steadfastness, with Thy sublime charity toward Thy executioners!... The very soldiers that lead Thee to execution weep and utter imprecations upon our race.... And the Pharisees blaspheme! Oh!... the vipers whom Jesus shall tread upon so soon in the glory of His triumph. Mother of Sorrows!.. I have heard your last words!... I have brought you the portrait of Jesus traced by a pen dipped in blood!.. I followed Him... My divine Master!... Blood ran down His checks... coagulated with sweat and dust.... and the Pharisees had no pity on Him!.. I pressed close to Jesus... the soldiers did not drive me away.. With a snow-white cloth I wiped the face of the Divine Master!.. and then, sublime miracle!.. His countenance was imprinted upon it, as if painted by a mystic hand. Behold, Mary... the image of your Divine Son... (She displays the towel.. Mary raises her hands to Heaven and contemplates the image of Jesus crowned with thorns; then with a sob of grief falls prostrate on the ground covering her face with her hands. The other women weep. Rachel approaches and kisses the holy napkin.)

MARY. — (Rising) My Son... crowned with thorns!.. stricken.. bleeding.. Our Father, who art in Heaven.. receive the blood of the most sacred victim that has ever been sacrificed upon Thy altars, and mingle this blood with that of my maternal heart. (She fixes her eyes on the distance as if petrified with grief at the sight of a fearful spectacle) Oh Mother-heart!.. be as resisting as well-tempered steel... have the hardness of adamant!... Jesus!.. Why dost Thou remain silent, resting upon Thy cross? Why dost Thou not blast Thy enemies with a single look of Thine?.... Oh, eyes of mine, why do you not deprive yourselves forever of the light of day!.. How terrible is Thy death-bed, oh Fruit of my womb!.. Alas!.. dost Thou not hear the blows of the hammers sinisterly resounding, making the withered wood of the cross reecho, tremble, fearful sounds which vibrate like human groans!.. And

Thou dost remain silent. My Son.. Thy features are contracted with pain!.. The last rivulets of blood spurt from Thy side, as Thy enemies utter cries of joy accompanying the sorrowful rhythm of the hammers of Thy executioners!.. And Thy dying look, my Son!.. has not a gleam of hate!.. The torch of love still burns luminous in Thee!.. Mother! be steadfast that thy heart may not break... Mother, hasten to witness the last agonized spasms of Jesus, thy Son, who taketh away the sins of the world!.. To Calvary!.. (She rises and starts to leave).

JOHN. — (While the holy women approach and surround Mary) Mother of Jesus... Alas!.. do not cross this threshold!.. Your mother's heart could not endure the torture of a suffering which would draw tears of the hardest rock! We cannot oppose the will of the Father. Jesus had predicted to us His martyrdom, decreed by the Father, and He has submitted to it like an innocent lamb!.. Mother, we will weep with you... Tomorrow we shall take you to kiss the bloodless corpse of the Master!.. But do not go to Calvary!.. The spectacle would be too frightful for your stricken heart!..

MARY. — A mother must follow in the steps of her Son.. She must suffer agony, but she must not abandon the pillow of her dying Son!.. I am strong enough to accept the sacrifice that the heavenly Father imposes on me. I will not be separated from Jesus, dying on the gibbet of infamy!.. I wish to receive His last sigh; to contemplate His last look... to hear the last accents of His dying prayer... to drink in the outrages of His enemies.. to caress with my maternal hand His limbs pierced by the executioners, to clasp to my breast His bloodless body... to declare in the presence of His enemies, that Jesus is the glory of my maternal bosom!.. to show the world that I am a mother who loves, suffers, prays, undergoes martyrdom, but does not die!.. If my Son dies on Calvary, my heart also will be a Calvary, which from its wounds will pour forth gushing rivulets of blood.. Follow me, my sisters, and you, John, do not abandon the mother of your Master!

JOHN. — I will follow you. Oh Mother!.. May my words be your comfort in your agony.

RACHEL. — May my caress soothe the suffering of your mother's heart! (Mary departs, followed by the holy women and the two apostles.)

RACHEL. — (Starts to follow, but stops, kneels, and with her hands hides her face, bathed in tears). Jesus.... it is too much for my poor girlish heart. The beating of

my heart is slower, life is leaving my veins.. My eyes would close at the sight of the gentle Master, with lacerated limbs, at the laments of Mary! And I must live... I am a girl... but grief transforms me into a woman. There is no potion like tears to give the strength of heroism to weak hearts. I must live for daddy... I must watch with him for his moment of weakness, I must fulfill the maternal office of giving him life, of giving him the resurrection, of giving him Jesus. (She rises and drying her tears looks out into the street. A few passers-by hurry past. Confused voices are heard)..

A WOMAN. — What torment!.. What torture!.. God would avenge himself on our people!..

A YOUTH. — The King of the Jews is on the cross.

A PHARISEE. — He who can destroy the temple and in three days can build it up again cannot cast down His own cross!.. Ha! Ha! Death to Nazarene!

RACHEL. — Jesus, victim of hate.. Pardon, pardon.. pardon... (She continues to watch the street. Suddenly she shudders; with trembling voice) Daddy... daddy.. come! I am alone.. do not forsake me.. Daddy! (Azar, sunk in thought, comes down the road that descends from Calvary. At Rachel's call he gives a start as if awakening from a dream. He looks upward; his face has a smile as of hope. Then he resumes his austere gravity).

AZAR. — Rachel, I come...

A PHARISEE. — Death to the disciples of Nazarene! (Without turning, Azar enters the house of Veronica).

RACHEL. (Raising her hands to Heaven). Jesus, take my life, take my heart, take my blood, take my sight, crucify me with Thee, but give me the joy of seeing my father at Thy feet, of hearing Him call Thee Master, of inundating him with the sweetness that Thou didst infuse into my soul!.....

#### AZAR, RACHEL.

(Azar enters, pale, anxious, thoughtful. Rachel throws herself into his arms.)

RACHEL. — Daddy, daddy, daddy!.. Jesus is dying!..

AZAR (With a start) Dying!.. (going to a corner, he scrutinizes the horizon) ...dying... A martyr is yielding up his life... for whom? I know not, Have I then a heart of stone, or am I a misguided man struggling fruitlessly against a power that rends the very fibers of my soul... I know not... Jesus of Nazareth! I see Thee again on Thy bloody couch of death, with Thy crown of thorns, with

streams of blood running down Thy pallid cheeks!... I see the potent flame of Thy glances, sprinkling with the dew of Thy love the rabble thirsting for thy blood! No man ever agonized like this. Like a venerable oak He is standing steadfast against the fury of the tempest. Jesus of Nazareth, Thy death will not be the death of a man.. therefore.. But is my mind wandering?.. My brain is clouded. A hand of iron grips my members, makes me bend my knees (He rises and kneels, but gets to his feet immediately, with a sarcastic, painful laugh). Truly, I am wandering.. to prostrate myself at the feet of a crucified Nazarene! I, Azar, revered master of the doctors of the law. I would be a foolish old woman. (He takes a few steps, raises his hand to his brow, and stops suddenly, his eyes fixed) ...Azar!.. Your hand is bleeding.. You are wounded.. (Looking at his hand) ...Jesus of Nazareth... Thou art pursuing me... This is Thy blood, the drops of blood distilling from Thy veins which fell upon my right hand when I approached Thy cross to contemplate Thy features...

RACHEL. — Daddy... and so the fingers of your hands also bear the crimson stains of the blood which has fallen from the torn and bleeding body of Jesus of Nazareth! Fear not, daddy! This drop of blood will be the soul of your soul, the life of your life, will be the eternal kiss of Jesus, imprinted upon the sinews of your heart. You will have Jesus, daddy! (Weeping, she leans her head upon Azar's breast, while Azar, profoundly moved, exclaims).

AZAR. — Daughter, do not weep. The sacrifice is completed. The prophecies of Jesus are being realized. He has predicted His death, and His death has overtaken Him!... Alas!... He Has predicted the ruin of Jerusalem, and I am afraid that the vengeance of God may yet reduce to ashes this city that persecutes the prophets.

RACHEL. — Father, I do not weep for Jesus wounded, reviled, crucified. I weep for those who have crucified Him, who have been His butchers, who have not had pity on His tears, who have counted the drops of His blood without being moved. I weep for the ruin which shall come upon us, upon our race, upon the people in whose veins flows the blood of the Messiah. I do not weep for Jesus. Oh, how beautiful He is, how divinely beautiful in His glory! His wounds are luminous diamonds, dazzling rubies; His eyes are no longer dim and lifeless. In them lies all the splendor, the joy, the charm, the palpitation of life, the flame of the burning forge, all the enthusiasm,

all the caresses, all the sighs, all the moans, all the ardors, all the enchantment of the love of God. Oh! I love Thee, Jesus, soul of my soul. I feel the soft breath of Thy voice, the gentle touch of Thy hand. I foresee the glory of Thy resurrection! I adore Thee, and I love Thee!... (she kneels, and after a brief pause, rising, asks) And do you love Jesus, father?

AZAR. — Daughter, I cannot tell you, I admire Him!.. I felt an immense pity at seeing Him scourged and crowned with thorns. I feel that in that shattered organism there is a Soul more lofty than ours; that in that Mind there is a knowledge infinitely superior to ours... I feel that Jesus attracts me! But I don't know.. Do I love Jesus?... My heart does not know what to answer... Perhaps...

RACHEL. — And yet I feel that you will love Jesus... (Turning her eyes towards Heaven, becoming transformed, transfigured) And we shall follow Jesus, you and I!... We shall go far from our country which persecutes the prophets. We shall cross seas, we shall preach the glories of Jesus... Oh!... the splendor of enchanted forests of marble.. of palaces rich with gold, with gems... Oh!... the gardens lighted by nocturnal torches which crackle and raise dense spirals of smoke!... They are human torches, daddy. (Stopping, with a smile of beatitude) And we also are living torches, father. You burn beside me.. and we talk of Jesus!... How supremely beautiful He is in the purple splendor of His wounds! He smiles on Azar and Rachel, and His hand pours a healing balm upon the wounds of our tortured bodies, and through the flames of the pyre we feel the breath of a cooling breeze that comforts us. (A pause... Azar with devotion contemplates Rachel. The latter, awaking from her vision, continues) Daddy, how beautiful Jesus is!...

AZAR. — Will He be beautiful on His cross?

RACHEL. — Father, we must admire Him with the eyes of the soul!... Father, have you never known the sweetness of prayer?... There is a prayer of Jesus that gives light to the blind, a prayer that stirs the inmost chords of the heart, a prayer that gushed forth from the soul of Jesus, a prayer that reveals all the delights of love!

AZAR. — (Profoundly moved) Repeat it, daughter...

RACHEL. — Prostrate yourself on the ground, father... raise your eyes to Heaven.... (Pause) ..Our Father, Who art in Heaven.....

**AZAR.** — (Rising with a sudden movement, and transformed face). Our Father, Who art in Heaven.. God.. the Father of the human race! I have found the formula that my soul anxiously sought... I have found the synthesis of divine and human doctrine. God, the Father, Who is in Heaven: Jesus, the Son, who visits the earth. Oh, human blindness!... I sought the light in the writings of philosophers, in the gleams of my intelligence... but I have found darkness instead. Jesus with a word illuminates me, discovers for me the path of life. (Prostrating himself.) Our Father, who art in Heaven... prayer that exalts my spirit. Rachel, favorite soul of Jesus, draw near. Your hands are holy. Lay them on my head, on the head of the father who gave you life of the body, and in whom you instill the life of the soul. With the beating of your heart quicken the pulses of mine. Reveal Jesus to me.

**RACHEL.** — (Placing her hands on her father's head) Father, you admire Jesus.. It is your intelligence that renders homage to Jesus... now listen to the urgings of your heart... What does your heart answer?...

**AZAR.** — (With an effort, with a trembling of his limbs, with a sob) Rachel, I love Him... I adore Him.. He is the Son of God!..

**RACHEL.** — (Transfigured) I thank Thee, Jesus!... We two hearts are but one in loving Thee, perhaps in making for Thee to-morrow the sacrifice of our lives, to live forever in Thee....

**AZAR.** — Our Father, Who art in Heaven!...

**RACHEL.** — Hallowed be Thy name; the name of Jesus, Thy Son, be resplendent with glory!

(Both prostrate themselves on the ground..... Suddenly there is heard the deep rumbling of thunder; lightnings flash upon the horizon; the heavens become dark; the earth trembles. As if a veil of shadows were cleft, Jesus appears, crucified between two thieves. A centurion stops in the road, lets fall his lance, and exclaims in a loud voice)

**CENTURION.** — Truly this man was the Son of God!....

(Gradually as the convulsions of the earth are calmed, and as the rumbling of the thunder is lost in the distance, a luminous ray, at first dim and feeble, then brighter, shines upon the bloodless face of Jesus. Azar slowly raises his arms towards Heaven, while he gazes fixedly on the cross. Then with cry which bursts from his heart)

AZAR. — Truly Jesus was the Son of God. My mind has revealed to me His hidden divinity? I believe in Thee, o Jesus! Thou art the Son of the Living God!

RACHEL. — (Rising transfixed, contemplating the cross with ecstatic eyes, with one arm caressingly about the neck of Azar, the other indicating the cross).

RACHEL. — Jesus, truly Thou art the Son of God! My heart has revealed to me Thy divine beauty. I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee, Jesus!....

(Father and daughter bow their heads in an attitude of adoration. A luminous glow inundates Calvary. Behind the Cross appear bands of angels with crowns of roses and lilies. Azar and Rachel prostrate themselves upon the ground. The curtain slowly falls)

THE END.









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